

OCTOBER



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SPIDER

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SWORDSMEN**

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THE MOST COLORFUL CRIME FIGHTER OF ALL TIME!

THE MASTER OF MEN! 10¢ SPIDER

Volume Twenty-Five

October, 1941

Number One



SATAN'S SEVEN SWORDSMEN

Book-Length *Spider* Novel

By Grant Stockbridge..... 10

How could Richard Wentworth, in any of his fabulous disguises, destroy the Little Brown Men of Dr. Fuji as long as Fuji's ghastly power had committed the *Spider's* staunchest allies to hunt the *Spider* unto death? . . . An epic battle of two giant wills, with the fate of all the people depending upon the outcome!

BARGAIN COUNTER CORPSE

A "Doc Turner" Adventure

By Arthur Leo Zagat..... 88

Doc Turner, grizzled savior of Morris Street, was helpless in his attempt to strangle Manhattan's newest racket—until Murder advertised a special Bargain Day in Corpses!

—AND—

THE WEB.....Conducted by The Chief 6

The staff surrenders to the reader!

THE SPIDER'S NEXT CASE..... 63

The author makes a startling promise!

STORY ILLUSTRATIONS BY JOHN FLEMING GOULD

NOVEMBER ISSUE ON SALE OCTOBER 3

THIS SEAL PROTECTS YOU



AGAINST REPRINT FICTION!

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"WE RACED DEATH DOWN A MOUNTAIN SIDE!"



A true experience of male nurse GROVER C. BIRCHFIELD, Los Angeles, Calif.



"WE WERE RUSHING A CARDIAC CASE by ambulance to the hospital one dark night," writes Mr. Birchfield. "We were two thousand feet up on a winding mountain road and six miles from our goal, when all lights blew out.

"THE PATIENT WAS AT DEATH'S DOOR. I gave him a shot of adrenalin, but I knew with horrible certainty that unless he reached the hospital quickly he could not live. Yet we dared not move without lights.



"THEN, I REMEMBERED OUR FLASHLIGHTS! Lying on a front fender, I played their bright beams on the road while the car careened down the mountain. Thanks to dependable 'Eveready' fresh DATED batteries, we won our race against death.

(Signed) *Grover C. Birchfield*

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“ONCE in a while,” writes *Frank Walsh*, of Boston, “why don’t you skim through your mail and publish just a series of short readers’ comments and views, instead of devoting so much valuable space to entire letters?”

This month, with a smaller space for *The Web*, would be a good time, we think, to utilize Frank’s sensible suggestion. Here we go:

Ricardo Scott Dale, of the U. S. Marines stationed at Quantico, lost and won an argument at the same time! Ricardo’s buddy argued that *The Spider Magazine* offered more exciting crime-fighting adventure than any other publication. Ricardo—although he had never read *The Spider*—disagreed. The only way the argument could be settled was for Ricardo to read the magazine. He did—and he lost. But he won a new companion—Richard Wentworth; and a new experience in fiction entertainment! Ricardo says: “Give me a *Spider* mag and leave me alone, and the situation is well in hand! The *Spider* is the magazine for the U. S. Marines!”

* * *

Noel Ramirez wants us to adopt

Everett Macomber’s suggestion concerning a department devoted to the F.B.I., with special stress on “preparedness.” (This issue is still being voted down quite strenuously.) Noel ordered a *Spider* pencil and another ring. He has bought several rings but seems to misplace them. “I do not find the story so interesting unless I’m wearing my *Spider* ring. So I’m ordering another today!” . . . Noel wants to write to other *Spider* fans, and for that reason, he asked me to give his address: 519 West 143rd Street, New York City.

The new *Spider* pencils, with the *Spider* seal as a special feature, have been going like hot-cakes.

* * *

Paul McDermott’s Spider Club, of Omaha, Nebraska, considers Grant Stockbridge a great man, and wishes to express its unanimous gratitude to Grant for creating the *Spider*. This club, incidentally, strongly favors the return of covers showing the *Spider* in full disguise, naming the June 1940 cover as the most effective one to date!

A veteran *Spider* fan is *Vernon Scherzer*, who used to write me a letter every

(Continued on page 8)

GIVEN



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SIMPLY GIVE AWAY FREE beautiful Pictures with well known White CLOVERINE Brand SALVE used for chaps and mild burns easily sold to friends and neighbors at 25c a box (with FREE Picture) and remit per catalog. Our 46th yr. Be first. Mail Coupon Now! WILSON CHEM. CO., INC., Dept. 910, TYRONE, PA.

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Just Plug In Electric
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NAME

RD or BOX No.....ST.....

TOWN.....STATE.....
Print Your Last Name Only in Boxes Below:

WRITE, or PASTE COUPON ON A POSTAL

(Continued from page 6)

month. Vernon was very surprised when Jackson got married, but he's gotten used to it by now and doesn't mind. He thought, however, that Jackson would find less time to fight alongside his beloved major, and he wondered if it wasn't in order for Grant to groom an aide to take his place. Vernon suggested Jack Murdock. Remember Jack? He was a determined young lad whose father had been killed by the *Spider*. So he swore he'd avenge his father's death by killing the Master of Men. Instead, he ended up helping the *Spider*, convinced that he was the best guy who ever lived—and he's not alone in that opinion!

There have been other requests, Vernon, to have Jack Murdock brought back into another novel. Grant is keeping him in mind.

* * *

"I am only twelve years old," writes Bill Cummins, of Canonsburg, Pennsylvania, "and at first my mother didn't want me to read *The Spider Magazine*. Now, she reads every issue along with me!"

We feel that Bill Cummins' mother is like thousands of other mothers who appreciate the moral tone of Grant Stockbridge's stories, not to mention the sportsman-like, honorable code of Dick Wentworth. Unquestionably the *Spider* has earned a high place among those who have dedicated their lives to serving and fighting for the RIGHT!

* * *

From Louisville, Kentucky, writes Robert McLain: "In the coming issues of the *Spider*, I wish that Grant Stockbridge would have the *Spider* fighting the Fifth Column. . ."

In deference to the many readers who

have been begging for a story with a strong Fifth Column background, Grant prepared this month's novel. It is not strictly "Fifth Column," although the major menace is of a subversive nature. However, Grant took great pains to preserve the *personalized* quality of the story—that quality which makes Grant's characters so human and life-like. In fact, I feel certain that even *Clayton Titus* will like SATAN'S SEVEN SWORDSMEN.

Clayton lives in Johnson City, New York. He says: "For gosh sakes don't have the *Spider* in the spy-hunting business. When the war started, most all crime-fighters of fiction went to chasing spies. Keep the *Spider* different. . . . Why not have him in a story where some master-mind criminal is wrecking commercial airliners? . . . How about a department on *jujitsu*, with illustrated instructions? . . ."

Well, Clayton, have you read SATAN'S SEVEN SWORDSMEN? How about the wreck of the airliner in which Lona Deeping was hurrying to Kirkpatrick? As for the *jujitsu* department—I'm afraid space is too limited, but in this story Grant gives you a pretty exciting battle between Sukimari, Wentworth's *jujitsu* instructor, and the *Spider*. It is one of the most thrilling hand-to-hand battles I ever read!

* * *

There is hardly a more devoted and ardent *Spider* fan than Virginia Combs. In her most recent letter she says, among other things, "I am so glad to see there is another *Spider* movie out, with Warren Hull again playing the part of Richard Wentworth. . . . Needless to say, I will do all in my power to get the manager of my favorite theater to obtain this serial. . . . I was delighted that the *Spider*

(Concluded on page 87)

IS YOUR Rupture GETTING Worse?

It is terrible to feel that your rupture is constantly getting worse, taking the joy out of life, even making you feel despondent—without your seeming to be able to DO anything about it! And yet, it's so needless! We have information for you that has brought deliverance and joy to thousands of men, women and children, as PROVED by their letters of gratitude—now on file in our office.

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X Where Is YOUR Rupture?

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Hard pad gouging in keeps Rupture open and prevents natural healing.

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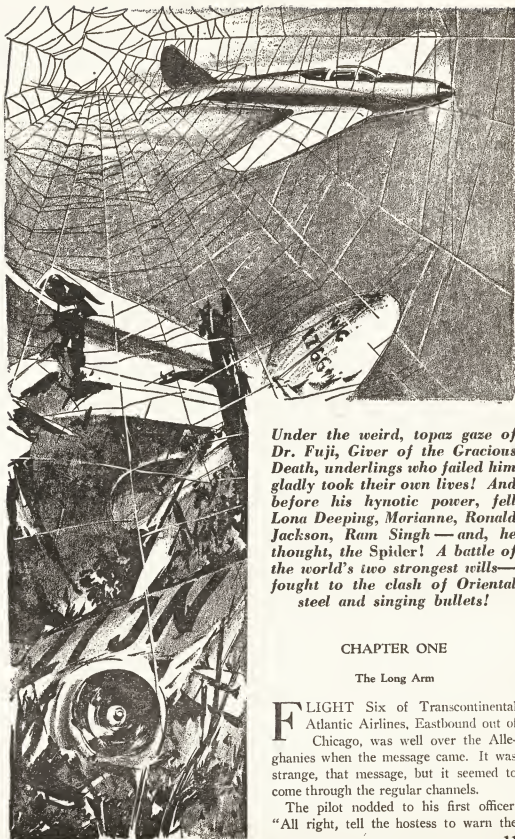
Name..... Street..... State Whether for Man ()

City..... State..... Woman () or Child ()

The background of the cover is a detailed illustration of a large spider on a web. The spider is positioned in the upper right, with its body and legs extending across the top half of the cover. The web is a complex, concentric spiral pattern. Below the spider, the web descends into a chaotic scene of what appears to be a shipwreck or a battle scene, with debris and figures visible. The overall style is a high-contrast, black and white woodcut or linocut print.

Satan's Seven Swordsmen

Book-Length Spider Novel
By Grant
Stockbridge



Under the weird, topaz gaze of Dr. Fuji, Giver of the Gracious Death, underlings who failed him gladly took their own lives! And before his hypnotic power, fell Lona Deeping, Marianne, Ronald Jackson, Ram Singh — and, he thought, the Spider! A battle of the world's two strongest wills— fought to the clash of Oriental steel and singing bullets!

CHAPTER ONE

The Long Arm

FLIGHT Six of Transcontinental Atlantic Airlines, Eastbound out of Chicago, was well over the Alleghanies when the message came. It was strange, that message, but it seemed to come through the regular channels.

The pilot nodded to his first officer. "All right, tell the hostess to warn the

passengers. We'll set down at emergency field 103. Only don't say, *for reasons of state*, as the message said. Tell them, *bad weather*."

The hostess smiled brightly as she moved down the aisle. "Fasten your belts, please," she said. "We are going to land here because of weather conditions ahead. We may be able to continue on to New York presently, but if not you will receive excellent accommodations on a special train."

One or two passengers glanced apprehensively at the jumbled patchwork of moonlit mountains below. But only one woman spoke. She reached out a slim hand to the hostess's uniformed arm.

"You are certain," she asked in a slow voice, "that the information you have about weather conditions is authentic?"

The hostess looked down at her in amazement. The woman's face was a dark oval beneath the midnight black of her hair. Under ivory lids, her eyes were dark . . . and frightened. Like the faintly slurred accent of her English, she was floured, Oriental in appearance.

The hostess wore her professional smile. "Oh, yes, quite authentic," she said. "Let me fasten your belt, please. There is no danger, of course, but it is a company rule in landing and taking off. Everything is all right, Mrs. Deeping."

Lona Deeping allowed the hostess to adjust the belt. She lowered her ivory lids over her dark eyes. Her breast lifted slowly, straining against the dark bodice. The hostess passed on with a faintly worried frown between her eyes. That was a funny question this Mrs. Deeping had asked. Not how bad was the weather ahead, or where were they stopping, but . . . *was the message authentic?* The hostess shook her head. You couldn't tell anything about old rock-face Smith, the pilot, but the co-pilot had looked excited. Something funny might be going on.

The hostess looked back, and sudden

alarm stirred within her. Mrs. Deeping was not in her seat! She was not in sight at all! The hostess hurried forward again, spoke to the man who had been seated behind Mrs. Deeping.

"Did you see where the lady went?" she asked, smiling.

The man grunted irritably. "Bad enough to be delayed like this," he snapped. "Weather reports were all right when we left. I checked them."

There it was again, a hint of something peculiar! The hostess smothered her alarm and hastened toward the control compartment. There was no other place Mrs. Deeping could have gone, without proceeding aft—past the hostess's station. Yet passengers weren't allowed in the cockpit!

Her alarm crystallizing, she gripped the handle of the sliding door that opened into the pilot's compartment, hesitated, then snapped it open and stepped through.

A slim hand reached out and closed about the hostess's wrist. "Shut the door," ordered Mrs. Deeping's soft slurred voice.

The hostess stared at her, her mouth opened to protest, and those delicate fingers turned to steel on her wrist. They hurt. There was a gun in Mrs. Deeping's right hand!

"Shut the door," she repeated.

The hostess closed the door hurriedly. Old stony-face Pilot Smith was good and sore, judging by the set of his shoulders. His eyes glared straight ahead. The co-pilot was peering out of his eye corners at the exotic woman with the gun.

"I have explained to your nice pilot," Mrs. Deeping said softly, "that I am sure the weather will not prevent us from reaching New York. I have explained also that a landing now might prove fatal to . . . some of us."

Below them, and to the right, the lights of a landing field flared on, blue-white against the blackness of the earth. The

co-pilot, earphones clamped on his head, shifted uneasily in his seat.

"We are being ordered down," he said, hoarsely.

Captain Smith's shoulders were rolled forward. "I have the passengers to think of," he said flatly.

"You will not answer the airport," Lona Deeping said softly. "Nor will you make your regular reports. You . . ." Her automatic thrust at the co-pilot, "you will radiophone ahead a request that many police will meet this plane at New York. Many police."

The co-pilot twisted entirely around to look at her. He shrugged elaborately. "Okay, baby," he agreed. "You've got the joystick." He picked up the microphone.

Lona Deeping's slow smile was pallid. Her soft lips were drawn. Beneath the ivory lids, her dark eyes were haunted . . . with fear. They were clever, those brown devils who pursued her, those cruel, small monkey-men of Nippon. She had not yet defeated them. She wet her lips.

"How long," she whispered, "before we land in New York?"

The co-pilot grinned at her. "Fifty-three minutes."

Lona Deeping drew a slow breath. Her gun hand was rock steady. "You," she gestured to the hostess, "will sit on the floor. You . . ." the co-pilot stiffened at the thrust of the gun. "You will keep your eyes straight forward."

She rested her shoulders solidly against the bulkhead. The gun rested against her hip, steadily. The plane droned on.



IT WAS twenty minutes later that the co-pilot spoke out sharply. "Captain Smith!—plane dead ahead!"

"Landing lights!" the pilot snapped.

Lona Deeping stiffened away from the



bulkhead as the co-pilot threw a switch that turned on the brilliant landing lights of the ship, sent twin dazzling white beams out into the darkness. Ahead of them, another such shaft of light blazed out. But the other plane bored straight toward them, on the same level, head-on!

So swift was the approach that almost as Lona Deeping spotted the other plane, Captain Smith thrust the wheel forward and the ship snapped into a dive. For an instant, the other plane's light blazed into Lona's eyes, then it had swept over.

The co-pilot said in a strained voice, "We are ordered to land at the field ahead," he said. "That guy says he'll open up with a fifty calibre machine gun!"

Lona Deeping said, heavily, "We will have to land. Hostess, you have a pencil and paper. Write these words, as they sound to you. Do not trouble too much with the spelling. You will see that this message is delivered to Stanley Kirkpatrick, Commissioner of the New York City police, and no one else. He alone will understand them. Are you ready: *Stanley medona, Akuranda tao bekor Nippon.* . ."

Her voice went on steadily, and the hostess, seated on the floor, wrote swiftly, frowning all the while. Once more the blazing lights smashed into the cockpit, and the pilot swept the heavy transport over in a vertical bank, dove out of it.

"Tell that damned fool we are landing," he said, harshly, "and that the federal government will send him to prison for life!"

Lona Deeping caught a deep sigh with

tightened lips. Those brown devils! She continued to speak to the hostess. "The signature is this: Draw a woman's face. It does not matter how crude. From the eyes, draw seven falling tears. Count them to be sure. Just seven tears. As you love your life—and your country—see that the message is delivered to Stanley Kirkpatrick, of New York police."

She put her hand on the door. "I warn you not to follow me," she said. "It is I whom those devils follow!"

She left the cockpit and the gun was concealed in a fold of her light cloak. She smiled at the passengers, and her rich slow voice was measured.

"Look to your belts," she said gently, "we are landing."

She went to the exit door and braced her hands across it, waiting. The big motors quieted and there was only the hiss of the wind. Beneath her, the dark earth glided past with frightening speed. It swept up to meet them. There were blazing lights on the airport, and green and red points of warning. Overhead, the attacking ship dipped in a low, moaning dive, swept upward, and down again.

On the field, there waited a dark, streamlined automobile. Beside it were two men. They were small men and they stood in rigid positions, like soldiers on parade. When the great plane trundled to a halt, those two men walked toward it ceremoniously. An attendant rolled a set of landing steps forward, set them to the door. Lona Deeping opened it and walked down, placidly, to meet the two Japanese.

The men bowed, drew in their breath in hissing politeness. Their teeth shone in empty smiles. Their eyes were opaque behind thick-lensed glasses. They closed in on each side of Lona Deeping and escorted her toward the waiting car. The twin motors of the transport roared again, pulled it smoothly into the air. It had climbed three hundred feet when Lona Deeping reached the car. She heard the

heavy beat-beat-beat of a machine gun and whirled about. The transport faltered, turned its nose toward the earth. The crash was cataclysmic . . . the woods swallowed the wreckage.

LONA DEEPING cried out, and the hands of the two men clamped solidly upon her arms. It was a foolish mistake for men who knew *jiu-jitsu*. It was the mistake of conceited men, who rarely credit others with their own skill. Lona Deeping surged forward, twisted. The two men were tripped, twisted, hurled to the ground, and Lona leaped into the limousine beside the driver.

"Drive," she ordered. "*Fast!*"

The man smiled and reached out a calm hand for the gun in her fist. Lona fired. The gun was almost against the man's face. He was hurled backward. She reached past him to the door, tumbled him out as she slid under the wheel. She sent the limousine forward with a roaring motor. She shifted gears fumblingly. They clashed and ground. The car yawed wildly, just missed the administration building, teetered out onto the road with a howl of strained tires. Sobs choked up into Lona Deeping's throat. They pounded at her temples. There were no tears in her dry eyes. She gripped the big wheel with frantic hands. It was plain she had rarely, if ever, driven before. The brutish monster under the hood hurtled her into the darkness of the night, her course weaving, desperate.

An approaching car swerved into the ditch. She missed it narrowly, sped on. The message she had given to the hostess could not now reach the Commissioner of New York police. She herself must escape! If she knew how to stop this monster of a car, she would desert it and run. She snatched a glimpse at the dash board, where unfamiliar dials twitched unmeaning messages at her. The car swerved wildly.

She fought the big car around a corner, and headlights blazed into her eyes. There were three pairs of headlights, side by side, and they all looked straight at her. She could not see. Lona Deeping cried out in a despairing voice. She pulled at the big wheel, and the car skidded viciously. It whirled completely around. There was a crashing of underbrush, a bursting, splitting sound of torn metal. Then the limousine was rolling gently backward toward the headlights. The car jarred to a halt. Dizzily, Lona leaped to the roadway. She sprawled, jumped up. The gun was in her fist again.

Three small brown men stood around her. They drew in their breath politely. Their eyes were opaque behind the lenses of their spectacles. They bowed low, very formally.

"You will please to come with us," said their leader.

Lona Deeping flung up the gun and pointed it at his face, and the man smiled and sucked in his breath. "You may kill me," he said placidly, "but you would not have time to shoot more than once. We do not wish to harm you, but you must come with us to speak to the Most High."

"*The—Most—High!*" Lona whispered, and her eyes flung wide with terror.

"I should not have so named him," admitted the leader. "He prefers honorable incognito. Shall we say . . . *Dr. Fuji.*"

Lona Deeping tried to pull the trigger of the automatic. It was leveled directly at him, and along the barrel his bland eyes met hers. They held all her attention,

so that a hand seized her wrist before she knew. It compressed certain nerves and the gun dropped from her fingers.

"It is written that you must obey," the leader suggested, and hissed politely.

Lona Deeping's shoulders sagged. Her hands lifted to her face. She was trying to fight. But something was numbing her brain. She must get free of these men. She must carry the warning to Stanley Kirkpatrick, the warning of what these small brown hellish men intended. She . . . her hands fell from her face.

Lona Deeping said, dully, "It is written that I must obey."

CHAPTER TWO

Seven Tears

HIS furlough had done a great deal for the health of Stanley Kirkpatrick, commissioner of New York City police. He was tanned and vigorous of movement. So much Richard Wentworth saw at once, when he entered the big barren office of the Commissioner at headquarters.

Yet Kirkpatrick was changed.

The stern lines of his face were blurred and the sharp keenness of his gaze was blunted. And Wentworth knew that the face reflected changes in the man's soul, and what secret grief had wrought that change. So his hand-grip was warmer.

"You hid yourself so successfully," Wentworth said lightly, "that I doubt if even the *Spider* could have found you!"

Kirkpatrick rallied to the challenge of that name, as always. His eyes, for a

"I have seldom read about a killer," says Grant Stockbridge, "whom the *Spider* would rather snare—than Midge Diamond!" Mr. Stockbridge was referring to the human panther that stalked Josette Donovan in *THE CORPSE WANTS COMPANY*, brilliant mystery novel by Edward S. Williams, appearing in *October Detective Tales*!

moment, had their flashing keenness. For though they were warm friends, Kirkpatrick long had been convinced that Richard Wentworth and that grim lone wolf of justice called the *Spider* were one and the same man! But the stab of his eyes faded quickly, and he smiled, turning back to his desk.

"You're right to goad me with it," he acknowledged. "After the alibis the *Spider* established for you in recent months, all my old suspicions become very foolish. May I offer my apologies for ever suspecting you, Dick?"

Wentworth lifted his smooth black brows in mockery. "You don't mind if I think it over a while, do you?" he asked. "And you're evading me—Where have you spent the last six months?"

Kirkpatrick said, with sudden harshness. "I'd rather not talk about it!"

Wentworth nodded quietly, and drifted to a broad window that looked out on busy Centre Street. More clearly than words, Stanley Kirkpatrick's manner revealed that he had spent those six months in hunting for the woman he loved—for Lona Deeping—who, because she had innocently become involved in criminal machinations, had disappeared to expiate her misdeeds. So that she would be "worthy" of Kirkpatrick's love!

Kirkpatrick had sought Lona Deeping . . . and he had failed.

At the window, Wentworth made a casual, indolent silhouette. He had dropped his hat on a rack beside the door, but he still carried his pearl-grey gloves and he leaned both hands on his ivory-headed cane. There was arrogance in the alert lift of his well-shaped head, and undaunted confidence in the line of his tailored

shoulders. Yet there was nothing sinister, nothing suggesting the man of action—nothing to reveal the fact that this dilettante clubman could change, in a few flashing moments, into the most dreaded nemesis of criminals the world had ever known; the man who himself was jury, judge and executioner when Underworld killers began to prowl!

"You return to a peaceful world," Wentworth said without turning his head. "Since you left the second time, there has been nothing even to call a police commissioner from his desk."

Kirkpatrick said, curtly, "I don't like the smell of that suicide last night. Allsworth, you know. But there's not a thing to go on. Important man to the defense councils. Settled more strikes than any other individual."

Wentworth echoed softly, "There's not a thing to go on."

The annunciator buzzer whirled and Wentworth heard Kirkpatrick sigh briefly before he slapped down a cam. But his voice was sufficiently crisp.

"A Mr. Jenkins to see you, sir," came the metallic voice.

Kirkpatrick ordered him in, and Wentworth turned sharply from the window. "That's a code phrase which means he's an F.B.I. man, isn't it? I wonder if he's here about Allsworth?"

THE door opened and "Mr. Jenkins" entered. He had a mop of curly hair and his eyes, behind rimless spectacles, were bland and innocent. They offered a confusing contrast to the swift and quiet efficiency of his movements and his voice.

"Marks, from Washington," he said





RICHARD WENTWORTH

quietly, and offered credentials. His innocent gaze roamed to Wentworth, took him in with a swift glance. For a moment his eyes went blank and Wentworth knew that he was combing his memory. Afterward, he smiled.

"Richard Wentworth, of course," he said easily. "If you don't mind, Mr. Kirkpatrick, may he stay? It's possible he can help."

Wentworth nodded from the window. "Anything at all," he murmured carelessly, but he felt a strong undercurrent of tension creep into the room. Marks, of the F.B.I., brought important news. Of that, he was sure.

"This isn't for general publication," Marks was saying crisply. "You know of that T.A.A. crackup last night. Twelve killed? Yes. Well, there were thirteen passengers aboard the plane at her last stop. One of them, a woman, disappeared. And there's no mystery about the reason for the crackup. The ship was machine-gunned. Pilot and co-pilot shot to death. The others were killed in the crash."

Wentworth frowned. "That's a bit fantastic, isn't it?" he said. But his mind took in the facts, and quested ahead. One person had disappeared. A woman. Obviously, the plane had been destroyed with all passengers to destroy knowledge of her disappearance, or else. . . . "Is the name of the missing woman known?" he asked carelessly.

Marks' smile was bland. "As a matter of fact, it is. The crash was not bad

enough to destroy identification. The missing woman is a certain Mrs. Lona Deeping."

Kirkpatrick started to his feet. Wentworth covered him with casual words. "Curious. I know a Mrs. Lona Deeping, but she went to the Orient some while ago."

Marks said steadily, "This Mrs. Deeping disembarked from the Pacific Clipper at San Francisco and immediately boarded a plane for New York."

Kirkpatrick said, hoarsely, "She . . . disappeared?"

Wentworth's mind was racing over the facts while a smile hid all expression from his face. If Lona's identity were known, then the death of the passengers could have been intended either to hide the method of her disappearance . . . or to prevent some information which Lona might have possessed from reaching authorities!

Wentworth strolled toward the desk. "If I might suggest," he said diffidently, "the wreck, the environs, and the persons of the dead, should be searched for some message."

Marks' bland eyes swung from Kirkpatrick to him, and there was happiness in them. "It took us five hours of investigation to reach the decision you made so promptly. "Mr. Wentworth," he said cheerfully. "May I compliment your ratiocinative processes?"

Wentworth waved a careless hand and looked at Kirkpatrick's stricken face. The lines about his lips had cut deep into his cheeks, and his eyes seemed to have sunk in a space of seconds. Kirkpatrick's voice was harsh, "You found no message?"

Marks said, "On the contrary. But it makes little sense. I brought it to you, Mr. Commissioner . . ." he was drawing out a wallet, removing a folded sheet of paper ". . . because some months ago you made a report to us of certain anony-



mous messages which were signed with a sketch of a weeping face. Frankly, Washington can make nothing of this message."

Wentworth bent steadily over the desk, but he knew that a knife of pain had been driven into Kirkpatrick's breast. The weeping face was the signature which Lona Deeping had adopted when she set out on her self-imposed task of expiation!

"As you will see," Marks' voice was impersonal, "the face is not executed in the same manner, nor is the handwriting the same as those earlier messages. But there is one point of similarity. As you know, with each note, there was a change in that signature, an increase in the number of tears. The last note reported had six tears. This one has seven."

Kirkpatrick whispered, "Seven tears. Seven tears."

WENTWORTH was frowning over the note. "You have been unable, you say to translate this message?" he said. "Obviously not code, but . . . *Stanley medona, akuranda tao bekor Nippon* . . ." Wentworth threw up his head, and repeated the words softly. "But it is quite obvious that this is a phonetic rendering of Burmese!"

Marks smiled happily, "I thought you might help."

Kirkpatrick's voice cut in harshly. "It is addressed to me, isn't it?"

Marks said, "It was addressed to you. But, Mr. Commissioner, I'm afraid we can't allow the translation to remain your private property."

Kirkpatrick's fists knotted on his desk, "No, no, of course not," he muttered. "Go on, Dick, read it aloud."

Wentworth nodded, "My Burmese is a little rusty," he said. "And, as I recall, Mrs. Deeping's Burmese was strongly colloquial. However . . . *Stanley medona*; Stanley beloved . . . *akuranda tao*, literally, I whisper to—I bring whispers . . . *bekor Nippon*. About—"

Marks said, softly, "We know *Nippon*."

Wentworth went on, easily, though his heart was wrung for his friend. "The message continues, roughly: There are seven samurai, seven little monkey gentlemen from hell, on their way to your beloved country. Their agents are here before them as I have just learned. They intend to destroy your country from within. They are poisonous and terrible. You must strike at them and swiftly. Somehow that gallant *Spider* must be warned. Tell him, if you can, that he who directs the *gracious death* is their leader."

Wentworth swiftly hid the dark anger that leaped to his eyes. He tossed the message down to the desk. "That seems to be all," he said. "A little confused. Probably dictated to someone else, in a hurry. A woman's writing. Fairly well educated. The writer was agitated. The light probably was not too good."

"A good reading, Mr. Wentworth," Marks said quietly. "I understand the art of graphology well enough to understand how you get most of that deduction from the type of handwriting in the note. But why 'fairly well educated?' You're right, incidentally. The hostess did the writing."

Wentworth smiled. "Only those with an acquaintance with foreign languages use 'i' to represent the sound of long 'e' in phonetic spelling. The handwriting is not of a foreign type. Hence . . ." he shrugged. "You know the man referred to as '*he who directs the gracious death*' I presume. That is, the F.B.I. does." His tone was careless, but there was nothing easy about his mind at that moment. *He* knew the man! It were better for America, if Satan himself had taken up the battle!

Marks said, "I must confess my ignorance, though the extensive files at headquarters. . . ."

"Doubtless," Wentworth murmured.

"It happens that I have spent many years in the Orient. I studied in Tokyo for a year, as your files undoubtedly will tell you."

Marks was polite. "And three years in Tibet in the lamasary of the Abbot, Mar-la-delan. You were at Heidelberg and the Sorbonne. The *salles des armes* of quite a few masters of the sword, in various forms. An imposing *dossier*. There was also a conviction for murder, an escape from the death house . . . and an eventual exoneration."

Wentworth shrugged slightly, "We gentlemen of leisure must do something with our wasteful years."

Marks nodded, his eyes alert now on Wentworth's. "You know this . . . *director of gracious death?*"

Wentworth's voice turned clipped and harsh. "I saw him . . . once," he said. "The rumor is that he is the real ruler of Japan. I have heard him addressed as 'Most High.' There is only one superior title, and that is 'Son of Heaven.' His existence is, perhaps, one of the reasons why Japan talks one way, and behaves another. Some men are foolish enough to speak without consulting him. Hence . . . *the gracious death.*"

"What is this gracious death?"

The smile on Wentworth's lips was strained. "I'd rather not talk about that," he said, in a low voice, and pallor crept across his cheeks. The *Spider* turned pale! "This man is known under the incognito of Dr. Fuji. His real name, no one is allowed to pronounce."

"Description?" Marks was very business-like now.

WENTWORTH'S eyes narrowed and he searched his memory for a certain day in Tokyo. "Imagine," he said softly, "a thin and worn old man, whose face is wrinkled like a dried lemon. Very much that color, too. He has an enormous skull, completely bald,

and it is his pleasure to wear a wig. This is black and hangs down in slabs on each side of his face below the ears. I have never seen his ears. If he could stand erect, he would be at least six feet tall. Don't ask me how that could happen to a Japanese. I don't know. His hands are long, slender, and extremely deft. His eyes . . ."

Wentworth shook his head, sharply. The vision he was conjuring up was too vivid, and he had a feeling of numbness that spread across his forehead. His eyes narrowed and, abruptly, by an exertion of will, he blotted out the picture of Dr. Fuji's eyes. He who had lived so many years in the East, who had studied under the great abbot, Mar-la-delan, knew that there are forces of which the Western world scarcely dreams, or at which they openly scoff: powers of the mind and spirit. He sensed, somehow, that his thoughts of Dr. Fuji had somehow reached out into space and touched the man himself, and that the man was not far away!

"A hypnotist?" Marks suggested.

"Among other things!" Wentworth laughed shortly, and looked at Marks with calculation. Marks obviously understood what had happened. "Dr. Fuji's eyes," Wentworth's voice was dry, "are yellow. Topaz yellow. They are quite large, and usually seem to have a sort of film over them. He can withdraw that film at will. Then, he has extraordinary power with his eyes. I have heard it said that he can will a man to death and that the man will die under his glance."

Kirkpatrick said, harshly, "Nonsense!"

Wentworth shrugged. "That is all I can tell you, Mr. Marks."

Marks soon departed and Kirkpatrick sat staring with blank weariness before him. At Wentworth's prodding, he finally stirred himself to put out an alarm for Dr. Fuji for questioning.

"What good will it do?" he asked

heavily. "Even if he should be found, what good would it do? We would have to release him. Lord!" He pressed prodding fingers to his temples; his eyes closed.

"Lona is in danger," he said presently. "In terrible danger, and there is almost nothing the police can do. Certainly, we can look for her, and for this man who holds her a prisoner." He looked up and there was a twisted smile on his lips. "Too bad you aren't the *Spider*, Dick!"

Wentworth lifted his brows in slow questioning.

Kirkpatrick said violently. "I have a few important words to say to the *Spider*. Very important!"

Abruptly, the printer machine in the corner which brought in important flash news from the police precincts began to jangle its alarm bell. In two quick strides Wentworth reached it. Kirkpatrick was slower, and they stood, side by side,

watching the words batted out rhythmically. Kirkpatrick's hand reached out for Wentworth's shoulder, rested there heavily. The hand shook.

"Homicide," the message ran. "Man discovered torn to pieces in Chopping Alley, between Martin and Destry. Reported by Patrolman Brooks who heard screams. Identity: Probably Mr. Jenkins, 345. Routine investigation."

Kirkpatrick said hoarsely, "Marks! That was Marks' badge number!"

Wentworth's fists knotted tensely. "Torn to pieces," he said, thickly. "Torn to pieces!"

CHAPTER THREE

Crawling Death

KIRKPATRICK'S investigation of the murder of G-man Marks kept him at his office long after dark. But there was little that could be learned,

Girls rave about the shaves you get
With thrifty, keen-edged Thin Gillette.
This blade skims off the toughest stubble—
Costs ten for four—saves time and trouble!



Save Extra Money! Get The Big New Economy Package, 12 For 27c

he told himself when finally his limousine carried him swiftly homeward. *Torn to pieces* was a literal description of Marks' death, nor had the mutilation been accomplished by an explosion. Moreover, no blast had been heard; only the screams, which had continued for some time, and a frightful *snarling*.

Kirkpatrick's stiff shoulders drew together a little at the thought, but angrily he thrust down his apprehensions. There was some logical explanation for what had happened. *There had to be!*

Slowly, Kirkpatrick forced himself to relax and, entering his apartment, he was aware of a heavy weariness that dragged at his body. Not only was there horror in him at the thing that had happened, but his thoughts went wearily and persistently over a familiar round, and found no break in the circle of despair. Lona Deeping had flown back to America to warn him against some horror out of the East. Her message had come through, but she herself had . . . disappeared.

Kirkpatrick found that he still was standing, hat on his head, in the middle of his drawing room. From the doorway, his houseman, Parker, was staring curiously. The Commissioner took off his hat impatiently, told the man to go. Dick Wentworth had drawn a very obvious warning from Marks' death; that it was not intended by Dr. Fuji that Lona's message should be known. Therefore, Kirkpatrick's life was in danger.

Angrily, Kirkpatrick flung himself into a chair. His hand strayed momentarily to the gun which his position compelled him to carry. The bulk of the weapon was uncomfortable under his arm and he drew the revolver, sat looking down at it with blank eyes. It was the symbol and the badge of the service to which he had selflessly given himself for many years. He tossed it in sudden impatience to the table beside him, sat staring bitterly in abstraction.

He could not have told how, long afterward it was that he became aware of a presence in the room. He shifted impatiently. "What is it, Parker?" he asked curtly.

There was no answer. He twisted about toward the door. He cursed then, made a stab for the gun on the table. A cool and mocking voice arrested the movement.

"No, Kirkpatrick," the voice said, flatly. "I think it would be very inhospitable of you to shoot at me. Besides—had you noticed?—my automatic is already in my hand."

Kirkpatrick turned slowly back to face the figure in the doorway. A man stood there, a man with curiously hunched and twisted shoulders, whose body lines were made amorphous by a long, draped black cape; whose hawkish face was shrouded by a broad-brimmed black hat. The muzzle of the gun glinted from the folds of the cape.

Kirkpatrick said, harshly, "Well, *Spider!*"

The *Spider* took a slow step into the room, stood where his back was against a wall. "I realize," he said, in the same softly mocking tone, "that you have only to call out to summon the policeman who stands guard outside your door. I hope you will not do that, Mr. Commissioner, for I have not come to threaten you. I want to make a deal, a service in exchange for some information."

Kirkpatrick's eyes burned at the face of the man, only half seen in the shadow of the slouch hat. For years, the police had tracked this man without result; this afternoon, he had half wished that he might get a message to the *Spider*. But that was a disloyalty to his oath. This man was a criminal. He had set that mocking red spider seal of his upon the foreheads of a score, a hundred men who had fallen before his swift guns. It was true that all those men had richly de-

served death, but no one man might take such decisions of life-and-death justice into his own hands. Not under the laws of America!

"I do not make bargains with murderers," Kirkpatrick said. That was his unswerving position. He would maintain it. Yet there was a shadowy thought in the back of his brain: that only the *Spider*, who acted beyond the trammeling confines of the law, could hope to protect Lona Deeping from the menace of . . . Dr. Fujii!

"Hear me, before you speak," the *Spider* said softly. "I said I could do you a service. It is this: I will do my best to restore to you . . . Lona Deeping."

KIRKPATRICK started, as men always do, when their thoughts have been read. He opened his lips but the *Spider* hurried on.

"I know why the T.A.A. plane was shot down last night," he said swiftly. "I know that Lona Deeping was aboard that plane, and was not killed. I know that an F.B.I. man came to you today and afterward was killed. I suggest that he brought to you some message from Lona Deeping. I must know the contents of that message! No, wait, Kirkpatrick. I know how you feel about me. I revere you for it. That is, I respect your honor, if not your good sense . . . but you must know that I have succeeded many times where the police have failed. Men who will shoot down a plane and destroy twelve human lives in order to keep a secret constitute a serious menace to society! Can you, conscientiously, refuse any help that might nullify that menace?"

Kirkpatrick was rigid in his chair. His stern lips twitched. The old struggle was in his heart again. He said, flatly, "I do not make bargains with murderers! Nor do I reveal official business to criminals!"

The *Spider* laughed. "Kirkpatrick," he said. "I love you! Men of your integrity are so rare! Actually, I have already the information I seek from you. I got it from Wentworth not an hour ago. Fortunately, he has no such scruples as yourself on that score, although there is a certain rivalry between us! But Wentworth said that today you spoke of wanting to talk to me. It was a request I felt proud to honor."



A reluctant smile stirred Kirkpatrick's lips. "You're an engaging scoundrel," he conceded. "I did say that, but it was in a moment of weakness."

"Not you, Kirkpatrick!"

Kirkpatrick was insensitive now to railery. Grimness crept into his jaw, lengthened his saturnine face. "I make no bargains, *Spider*," he said.

"But I know . . . many things," the *Spider* said softly. "I promise you that whatever can be done to help Lona Deeping will be done."

Abruptly, the *Spider's* head jerked toward the left. There was a faint hissing sound there. It seemed to originate in a liquor cellarette set against the wall. As the *Spider* stared, he saw a faint and greenish vapor seep out of the closed doors and begin to spread across the floor! It was at that same moment that Kirkpatrick stabbed his hand toward the gun on the table!

The dodge of a cobra-fighting mon-goose could be no swifter than the *Spider's* movement. The automatic in his

hand shifted an inch and flame leaped from its muzzle. The bullet struck the gun for which Kirkpatrick snatched and hurled it against the wall. In the same fleeting moment, the *Spider* dodged through the doorway he had entered!

Kirkpatrick bounded after his gun, seized it and raced for the doorway also. The green vapor from the celarette swirled upward with his passage. A faint wisp of it was caught in the eddy of air about him and licked the tail of his coat. Instantly, the cloth turned brownish, turned charred and fragile. He did not notice. As he ran, Kirkpatrick snapped a police whistle to his lips and blew a piercing blast. In the darkened hallway he flung open the entrance door. A uniformed policeman stumbled in.

"The *Spider* is in here," Kirkpatrick snapped. "Guard the door!"

HE RACED off toward the service section of the house and the second exit. He was sure the *Spider* had not had time to escape. His gun was firm in his hand. He had no doubts now, no hesitancy about his course of action. The *Spider* was a criminal!

The policeman had his gun in his fist and he turned his head about with stiff slowness, staring at shadows and hints of shadows. There was coldness at the pit of his stomach. *The Spider!* He had never seen the man, but he had heard a thousand stories about him. How he could vanish into thin air, or knock a man out just by looking at him. You didn't believe that sort of stuff, of course, but you heard it and it did something to you.

The cop gulped, his eyes widening on a dark corner. The shadow there seemed thicker than mere darkness. It looked like there might be somebody crouching there, somebody who wore a black cape and a black hat.

"Hands up there!" the cop ordered,

and his voice broke. "Get them up before I shoot!"

There was no movement in the corner. The cop did not notice that he stood directly in front of a closet door, and that the door was ajar.

"Damn you!" the cop said.

He leaped toward the corner and snatched . . . and a cape fluttered into the air, and a broad-brimmed hat flopped to the floor. It was the *Spider's* cape and hat all right . . . but the *Spider* had vanished into thin air!

The cop began to tremble. He stood with the cape draping from one hand, and his gun draping from the other. He did not see the door open softly behind him, nor the hand that reached for his throat. Only a sharp stab of pain jerked through his nerves. His head whipped up, and darkness took him in the same moment.

There was a gentle smile on the lips of the *Spider* as he carried the unconscious policeman out into the hallway and laid him on the floor. He put on his cape and hat again, stepped back into the apartment.

In the drawing room, the green vapor had crawled over the entire floor, was creeping upward about chair legs and walls. The soft woollen rug was a charred ruin. At the windows, silken drapes were burned off. Silk and wool. *Animal fibre*. The *Spider* felt pallor creep across his face. It was apparent that the gas would attack only animal fibre . . . and men were of animal substance!

God in heaven, that gas would burn the life out of any human being it touched! It had been intended to destroy Kirkpatrick, horribly!

Wentworth had guessed the murderous intent of the gas without knowing its power. That was why he had acted with swift efficiency to pull Kirkpatrick out of the room before it could strike. But the danger was not removed. The effect of

the gas might linger for hours. And Kirkpatrick would not listen to words from the *Spider*. He would not . . . and yet he must, if his life were to be saved!

Even as the thought flashed across the *Spider's* mind, he heard the swift beat of Kirkpatrick's feet as he raced back—into the very jaws of death!

Kirkpatrick could not be tricked by any such subterfuge as had trapped the policeman. His feet pounded into the hallway . . . and Wentworth leaped into the drawing room! Just inside the door he checked and stood there for the seconds it took Kirkpatrick to reach the arched entrance.

FROM behind the column, Wentworth flung his cape violently into Kirkpatrick's face. It blinded and enveloped him and Kirkpatrick struck at it furiously, jerked up the revolver. It was the moment for which Wentworth had played. He leaped to the attack, seized the gun-hand with both of his. He was back in the hallway now, throwing his explosive strength and co-ordination into a flurry of action. He wrenched the gun free, tossed it and, in the same swift flow of movement, had Kirkpatrick helpless in a hammer-lock.

Kirkpatrick managed then to strike clear of the cape, but he could move no more. He stood, stiffly resisting the holds, anger burning in every atom of his being.

The *Spider* said, quietly, "I am sorry to do this, Kirkpatrick, but you would not have listened to me. Now, we will walk to the door of your drawing room, and you will see why this is necessary. Please do not oppose the movement."

Kirkpatrick's voice came out, chokingly. "When you release me, better knock me out quickly, *Spider*," he said. "Very quickly . . . or this will be your last escapade!"

The *Spider* said nothing, but eased

Kirkpatrick toward the door in a position so that he could see the interior of the drawing room. He explained softly then about the gas from the cellarette.

"You would not have listened, Kirkpatrick," he said. "I had to take you prisoner to save your life! Kirkpatrick, I want your parole that you will delay summoning help for ten minutes, to allow me to escape. Otherwise, I shall have to knock you out and the search will be delayed longer than ten minutes."

Kirkpatrick said stiffly, "I appreciate what you have done, *Spider*, but I cannot give my parole to a criminal."

Wentworth sighed and laughed ruefully, "You are so stubborn, Kirkpatrick."

He turned the Commissioner toward the exit into the hall, and at that moment, the door began softly to swing open!

The *Spider* swore under his breath, but did not change his position. He watched the lighted crack widen. It was as if a hand were pressed positively, firmly against the door, pushing it open. Then, suddenly, it was shoved wide.

Kirkpatrick gasped, "Lona! Lona!"

She stood in the doorway, Lona Deeping, with one hand pressed against the middle panel, and the other gripping a small, heavy-calibre revolver.

She looked into Kirkpatrick's face without any sign of recognition at all in her dark, lovely countenance, this woman whom Kirkpatrick loved and who loved him in return.

"So," she said flatly, "you still live!"

She lined the revolver at Kirkpatrick's breast and fired point-blank!

CHAPTER FOUR

"I Must Die"

THERE was nothing that Kirkpatrick could do to avoid the bullet of the woman he loved, even had he been able to realize in time that Lona

Deeping was going to shoot. He was taken completely by surprise. There had been disappointment in her voice when she remarked that he was still alive! She preferred him dead!

Yet this was the woman to whom he had given his treasured love; and who returned that love . . . and there was no recognition in her eyes; neither hate, nor scorn, nor love, nor any emotion save disappointment—that he still was alive!

So Kirkpatrick would have died—except that he happened to be the *Spider's* prisoner.

The *Spider*, at least, was not too stunned to see the woman's gun come up, nor to misunderstand her intention. As the revolver swung into line, the *Spider* hurled himself to the floor and dragged Kirkpatrick with him. Even before the Commissioner struck, the *Spider* was in action again. He went forward in a low dive, and his arms clamped solidly about Lona Deeping's knees. The drive of his weight carried her out of the room, knocked the gun from her hand. It clattered to the floor.

He caught her into his arms, sprang back through the closing door of the apartment, and had his gun leveled at Kirkpatrick, while he held the woman prisoner with a hard clamped arm.

But Kirkpatrick showed no intention of moving, or of trying to escape. He lay as Wentworth had hurled him, slumped against the wall. His eyes were open, and they focused unbelievably on the face of Lona Deeping; with pain and despair and longing.

Lona Deeping said, impatiently, "Why do you look at me like that? Is it such a horrible thing then, to die?"

Heavily, Kirkpatrick pushed himself to his feet, and the *Spider* released Lona Deeping with an admonitory prod of his automatic, and stepped back into the shadows. It was as if he were not there,

so skilfully did he blend his body with the configuration of the shadows.

Kirkpatrick said, brokenly, "Lona—Lona, you tried to kill me!"

Lona Deeping spread her hands in a pathetic little gesture. "I still do not understand why that should surprise you. And how does it happen that you know my name?"

Kirkpatrick did not seem to hear her. He took her shoulders in his hands, and the fingers bit deep into her flesh so that her face twitched. But she did not complain. Her dark, lustrous eyes were on his face.

"Lona," Kirkpatrick repeated again. "After all these months! You knew I was looking for you, and you went away again. And when you return—I don't care! I don't care about anything, except that you're back. Lona! Lona, my dear!"

He caught her fiercely into his arms, kissed her mouth. And Lona . . . submitted. But she was like a wooden thing in his arms. When finally he stepped away from her, Kirkpatrick was short of breath, and anger flushed hotly into his cheekbones.

"Lona!" he cried. "Don't I mean anything to you any more?"

The woman pressed the back of her wrist to her forehead. "You never meant anything to me," she said woodenly. "If you abuse me, I must submit."

Watching them with narrow, pain-ridden eyes, the *Spider* nodded slightly to himself. Kirkpatrick seemed to have forgotten his presence. That was all right. He slipped outside the apartment door and hurried to a window at the hall's end. He struck a match there, deliberately, and lifted it twice and then, with the flame, inscribed a circle on the glass pane. In the street, five stories below, he caught the flare of a match and, for an instant, a woman's lovely face was illumined in the

yellow halo; the face of the woman he loved: Nita van Sloan.

LONG ago, Nita had accepted the life he had chosen to lead: his life of service. But she had insisted, in the name of their love, and the sacrifice they made to service, that she be allowed to share his peril. She was on watch now, and he had just signaled her to follow Lona Deeping when she left!

Swiftly, the *Spider* glided back to the door of Kirkpatrick's apartment which he had thoughtfully left on latch. The policeman lay unconscious against the wall, and the *Spider* stooped over him for a moment; made sure that he was all right. He pressed close to the half shut door of the apartment and through that opening he heard Lona's voice lifting in terror.

"But I cannot stay!" she cried. "I cannot stay! If I remain here, a captive, I will die!"

The *Spider* shook his head in sorrow, for the fear in Lona's voice was terribly exaggerated . . . but terribly real. There was no doubt that she believed she would die! There was no mystery for the *Spider* about the behavior of Lona Deeping. To him, it was quite apparent that this woman out of the East . . . born there of English parentage, but raised as a harem woman in Burma . . . had once more fallen

a victim to the persecution of some evil power. She was no longer the mistress of her own behavior. Under the command of a powerful will, Lona Deeping had come here to kill; now she cried that if she were kept prisoner, she would be doomed to death!

And that, too, was a subject of command. Her master—and Wentworth thought he knew the identity of that master!—had imposed his will upon her, and told her that if she were taken prisoner she would die. Because she had no power to resist that command, the *Spider* knew that there was grave danger that she would die!

This was the basis of much of the superstitious business of voodoo killing; of witch-doctor terror in a thousand aboriginal settlements. There was ample testimony that men and women had been killed by the machinations of these sorcerers—*simply because the victim believed the witch doctor had the power to kill by that means!*

Lona's terror gave ample evidence of her belief!

Inside now, Kirkpatrick was arguing with Lona with fierce tenderness. "I do not understand why you have done what you have, Lona," he said, "but I know that I will not permit you ever to leave me again. As for this business of dying, I will protect you against anyone and



everyone! You shall never leave me again."

Lona moaned, "I will die. You do not understand. I will *die*!"

The *Spider* pushed the door open a narrow slit. Kirkpatrick had Lona in his arms and was glaring angrily about him, but it was an enemy that Kirkpatrick could not see that was working on Lona. Already, the woman was wilting visibly! Useless to argue now with Kirkpatrick. His mind was closed to everything save the fact that the woman he loved was in his arms at last.

The *Spider* leaped into the apartment and, in the same swift moment, struck Kirkpatrick down. The moment his arms loosened, Lona was gone like an arrow sped from a bow. Sorrowfully, the *Spider* looked down on his friend, then carried him to a place of comfort and safety from the assault of the gas. It was necessary for him to wait until Kirkpatrick was recovered enough to defend himself against further attacks. But he had no fear of losing the trail. Nita van Sloan would make sure that Lona Deeping did not evade her. Wentworth thought that Lona Deeping would lead him to the master who dominated her; and he thought he knew who that master was—a veritable master of evil!

Dr. Fuji!



IN THE swift little coupé in which she waited, Nita van Sloan sat tensely. She had caught the *Spider's* signal from the window above and, since she alone among women knew the *Spider* and all his plans, she made an instant shrewd guess at the identity of the woman she was presently to follow.

Because she knew well the cleverness of Lona Deeping, Nita had put in a hurry call for help! But she had not chosen to

call the giant Sikh who drove Wentworth's car; Ram Singh had an almost superstitious veneration for Lona Deeping. Nor had she called the *Spider's* only other servitor: Ronald Jackson. She called Jackson's wife, Marianne.

Marianne Jackson knew little about the *Spider*, or about Wentworth, but she had married his comrade-at-arms, and she had pledged, and proved, her loyalty. Also, Marianne was sharp enough to cope with Lona on equal terms. So Nita van Sloan waited now for Marianne Jackson's arrival . . . and watched the doorway of the apartment building in which Kirkpatrick lived. Nita was deeply devoted to Stanley Kirkpatrick, and was apprehensive concerning his safety. Yet she admired and understood Lona Deeping, too.

Abruptly, she leaned forward. Lona Deeping hurried out of the entrance of the building and climbed immediately into a taxi cab that swung, without signal, to the curb. At the same moment, Nita caught in the rear vision mirror a double flicker of the headlights of another coupé that was speeding toward her. Marianne had arrived.

Nita van Sloan laughed softly, her red lips merry as always when she went upon the service of the *Spider*. She sent her coupé rolling forward, with a sense of complete security. If she lost the trail, or had to drop it for any reason, Marianne would keep on and track down Lona!

Nita van Sloan drew her shoulders together suddenly in a small shudder and looked swiftly about her. She saw nothing that could be frightening. Perhaps she had seen the shadow of a man stoop into the darkness beside the apartment wall. She thought not. No, there was nothing to fear on this simple job of trailing another woman whom she loved, and who loved her. Nothing to fear at all.

Nita van Sloan laughed . . . and still she felt cold.

THE room was very hot. There were no windows in it at all, and no apparent doors. Overhead were fixtures that threw heat and dazzling light.

The room was spacious and, at regular intervals across its width were low tables on which rested pots and flats of flowers. Most of the plants were curious specimens. They look like gnarled and ancient trees, yet the largest of them was no more than two feet high.

There were other rows of tables that held flowers, and these gave off a sickly odor. Among them were intricately woven spider webs, but on the spun silk, nothing moved. Nothing moved at all.

There were only two persons in the huge hall. One of them was a dainty girl whose raven-black hair was piled high on her head in an intricate pattern, thrust through with decorative pins of ivory and jade. Her face was lovely, doll-like, and she moved deftly about among the twisted small trees, pinching a bud here, or a root-let there. Her kimono was cloth-of-gold, and she moved like a golden girl.

The other person was a man. He wore a thickly padded kimono of silk and wool and even in the intense heat, his skin was dry and parchment-like. It was wrinkled incredibly, and it was apparent that he wore a wig on his head. It was a completely incongruous wig, and sat on his head like a hat, laying a black slab of hair down each side of his furrowed face.

It was apparent that, if his back were not bent, he would have stood fully six feet tall.

He looked amusing, totally harmless, and he followed on slow feet the dainty movements of the doll-girl in gold. His wrinkled lips pursed and sucked as he breathed. Lids like old ivory were lowered over his eyes.

And then his lids lifted, and his eyes blazed out from beneath the cavernous

brows! His eyes were like topaz, and with the sparkle and fire of precious jewels. They had depth and their pupils were vertical like those of a cat!

The doll-girl had her back turned, but when his eyes opened . . . she stopped—and stood shivering.

"Yes, Master," she whispered.

She went about to the other side of the table and leaned across it to pinch a quarter inch of white root that had thrust out through a hole in the porous bowl.

The man had not spoken.

Somewhere in the dim fastness of this man-made jungle, a chime tinkled a curious scale and, presently, a small brown-skinned man hurried among the tables of flowers and prostrated himself before the withered old man.



"I know the woman failed," said the old man.

The man knocked his head on the floor and did not look up. "All things are known to the Most High," he intoned, then he shivered. "Your pardon . . . Dr. Fuji!" he cried, and sucked in his breath energetically.

"That is right, you must not so call me here," the old man whispered. "No, my earthling, we will not yet send the woman the Bouquet of Failure. She is still valuable to us."

"Doubtless," whispered the prostrate man. "Doubtless. . . . Dr. Fuji knows also that a woman follows the woman who is thy slave."

"That is known," Dr. Fuji admitted, and his lids abruptly lifted from his eyes. His wrinkled lips smiled. "Indeed, that



is known! This other woman will be stopped, and her identity established. Without her knowledge you will present her . . . with this."

From the sleeve of his kimono, he brought out a fragile little box of wood, shaped like a matchbox. He held it on the wrinkled yellow palm, and his fingernails were arched and long as claws. The prostrate man thrust himself unwillingly from the floor. Still he did not look upon the face of Dr. Fuji. He looked at the box on the old man's palm, and he began to tremble. Beads of perspiration popped out on his upper lip and under his eyes and on his brow.

His hand lifted like the hand of an automaton. With a silken handkerchief, he gingerly picked up the matchbox. He held it at arm's length from him, and still he trembled.

"Yes, yes," murmured Dr. Fuji, "I permit this other woman . . . to die *graciously*."

The man flung himself down and bumped his forehead and, on his knees,

crawled backward across the room. And still he held the little box at full arms length.

Dr. Fuji turned slowly until he faced the golden girl. She was shivering, suddenly and violently.

"You pinched off a quarter inch too much of that root, my little lotus blossom," said Dr. Fuji, in his courteously sibilant voice.

He reached out his claw of a hand toward the girl. In his palm lay a jade dagger. His eyes focused on hers. She shuddered, and went rigid as a board. She did not cry out, nor did she shrink from the clawed hand. She took the jade dagger. And there, before the stunning gaze of the Most High, she committed *hara-kiri*!

"My other lotus blossoms," whispered Dr. Fuji, "will learn not to pinch off too much root."

He walked past her, sucking at his wrinkled lips, eyes hidden under wrinkled lids. The golden girl lay on the ground. There was blood on the gold.

WITHIN minutes after the recovery of Commissioner Kirkpatrick, there sounded, in a dark street nearby, a faint and eerie whistle. It was not loud, and yet it had a curiously carrying quality.

At the wheel of a powerful limousine, a broad-shouldered Hindu jerked to attention. Instantly, he had the big car rolling and his turbaned head swung from side to side as a dog scents the wind.

Abruptly, he cut the car to the curb. The rear door opened and closed, almost silently, and the Daimler sped from the curb. But now it had a passenger . . . the *Spider*!

He called a crisp command, and the Daimler swung into the route that Nita van Sloan had followed in the pursuit of Lona Deeping. That much the *Spider* had seen from a window. Meanwhile, he worked with swift hands and presently the disguise of the *Spider* disappeared into secret compartments within the limousine. Once more, Richard Wentworth, gentleman of leisure, was rolling placidly through New York streets, apparently bent on pleasure. . . .

Now, he switched on a radio in the car and, reaching to the roof, spun a concealed direction-finding loop. A thin note came from the receiver, persistently repeated. It grew in volume, dwindled, swelled again and held constant. Wentworth glanced at the direction indicator. There was an automatic transmitter in Nita van Sloan's coupé.

"Still northward, Ram Singh," he called softly to the Sikh driver.

The Hindu lifted a hand in salaam. His bearded face was intent, and his fiercely dark eyes glowed. *Wah!* Perhaps they went into battle together! It had been long since he had fought beside his master, and his steel grew thirsty again. Ram Singh began to chant a war song of his native Punjab hills. It was like muted thunder. The car picked up speed while Wentworth continued carefully to adjust the direction finder.

Twenty minutes later Wentworth leaned forward with a sudden sharp order. A block ahead, Nita's coupé was being crowded to the curb by a larger car! Wentworth's twin automatics leaped to his hands; the Daimler slid to the curb and halted. It stood there, its motor panting restlessly. Wentworth's guns rested. He waited.

Nita van Sloan was in the coupé all right. There were three men in the other machine; small men who stepped smartly to Nita's car and bowed with clicking heels . . . and hissing breath. Wentworth's eyes grew narrow, and hard, but still he waited.

The trail of Lona Deeping already was lost, it appeared, but these men would do just as well. There was no doubt that they, too, came from the headquarters of . . . Dr. Fuji!

So long as Nita appeared in no danger, he would hold his fire. And wait. . . . And wait. . . .



NITA VAN SLOAN was taken entirely by surprise when the big car crashed suddenly into her fender. Her hand dropped instantly to the purse in her lap, and her slim white fingers closed competently about the butt of an automatic that lay there.

Instantly, three small men popped out of the car. Nita saw at once that they were Japanese. They bowed very formally, clicking their heels, sucking in their breath.

"So sorry for collision," one intoned. "Most unfortunate indeed. Madame should not have cut across our path."

Nita smiled coldly. They had knocked her off the trail of Lona Deeping, but she had glimpsed Marianne Jackson continuing the chase, and so she was not greatly alarmed. Marianne, too, drove a car with a direction broadcasting unit, but with a tone different from her own. She would switch it on now. And, suddenly, Nita laughed aloud. That was the Daimler behind her! Dick Wentworth was at hand. Whom, then, should she fear?

"A mistake in judgment," Nita said smoothly to the spokesman of the three Japanese. "Has much damage been done?"

"Must trouble you for driving license." The spokesman still smiled.

"Certainly," Nita snapped. She was already a little weary of this grinning politeness that hid such malefic cold. She drew her hand from the purse, and leveled the automatic across the metal sill of her window. "This is my driving permit," she said softly. "Now, get that car away from mine, before I . . ."

Nita did not see the man whose hand suddenly clamped down on her wrist, but she felt the electric shock of those fingers gripping nerves in her forearm. The gun fell from stiffened fingers, and the Japanese who had done it scooped her purse from her lap.

"So sorry," he murmured, "but must see driving permit."

Nita flung a sharp glance into the rear vision mirror. The Daimler was still motionless back there. She caught the flicker of a struck match in the tonneau. It was shielded in two hands, cupped in them so that the light burned within their housing. Nita smiled. Dick Wentworth was telling her to go home!

Already, one of the Japanese was handing back her purse. "So sorry, Miss van Sloan," the leader said. "There is no need to detain you farther."

Nita caught her purse and peered into it instantly. Her automatic had been replaced; nothing seemed to have been disturbed. She frowned briefly at what seemed to be a small wooden matchbox. She didn't remember ever seeing that matchbox. But probably it was important. She snapped her purse shut.

The Japanese car was backing clear of hers. The leader was smiling at her, still coldly, still deadly polite. He sucked in his breath, hissing. "You have our permission, madame, graciously to depart," he said.

The man giggled and repeated the words, happily, "*Graciously to depart!*"

And Nita van Sloan slammed the car into gear and jerked it away from those loathesome small men. She did not think again of the matchbox.

She did not know that it had come from the kimono sleeve of Dr. Fuji, the master of the gracious death, the mere mention of which could make even the *Spider* turn pale!

CHAPTER FIVE

Seventh Gentleman

RICHARD WENTWORTH had no way of knowing the death that Nita van Sloan carried in her purse. Yet, he sensed some nameless

menace directed at Nita as he watched the sedan of the three Japanese leap into motion. His hesitation lasted only an instant. The *Spider* was pledged to let no personal consideration take precedence over his work.

At his signal, Ram Singh rolled the Daimler swiftly in the wake of the three Japanese. And the Sikh was rumbling beneath his breath. *Wah!* They held off from attacking three tiny brown monkeys. They were scarcely worth a warrior's steel. Yet they would fight. They had courage. Ram Singh shifted his shoulders in resentment.

Behind him, Wentworth knew his thoughts and smiled faintly, even while once more he manipulated the direction finder. Nita's signals came in clearly, but suddenly there was another, dimmer series of notes, in a different pitch. What could that mean?

For a moment, Wentworth frowned, and then his brow cleared. The pitch was F sharp. That was the car assigned to Ronald Jackson, who had been his sergeant in the war, and his comrade-at-arms in many later, and more dangerous battles. That meant either Marianne or Jackson was ahead of him . . . trailing Lona Deeping!

Wentworth laughed aloud. Trust Nita to understand the full potentialities of a situation and take her precautions! He saw that the brown men, and the radio signals that were Lona Deeping's trail, followed the same course. He leaned back

against the cushions and closed his eyes in relaxation. That was how he could think best.

Kirkpatrick should be amply protected by now, but he thought that the worst of the danger to the Commissioner had been eliminated. He himself had taken the precaution of sending a detailed translation of Lona Deeping's message to Washington. It had been spread upon the police records. There no longer was any possibility that enough persons could be killed to prevent that important message from being known.

And, Wentworth reasoned, Dr. Fuji must surely know that!

Wentworth nodded grimly to himself. Dr. Fuji would know, but the fact that authorities had been warned would not deter him from doing the work for which he had come to this country! Wentworth realized that unless the *Spider* struck with sudden and formidable force, nothing could prevent initial success for the agents of Japan! The fact that the government of the Far Eastern Isles might know nothing of Fuji's operations, might even disapprove of them, made no difference. Fuji's success would weaken the United States so that it would fall easy prey to any powerful conquering nation!

And the government, and the *Spider*, knew nothing of how Fuji planned to strike!

Abruptly, the sedan of the Japanese spurred, crashed a changing traffic light, and whirled down a side street at accelerating speed.

"Steady, Ram Singh," Wentworth called quietly. "They think they are being trailed. We do not need them any longer."

The radio signals came in steadily and strong, increasing in volume every minute. Marianne was somewhere straight ahead.

"Watch for attack," Wentworth's voice went on softly. "They are apt to



circle and, if they have spotted us, make an assault!"

Ram Singh threw back his head in deep laughter.

Wentworth's own lips curved in an answering smile. "If that happens," he said. "You will fight, Ram Singh, while I run away."

Ram Singh laughed again, in rich appreciation of the jest. His master run away!

"*Wah, sahib,*" he rumbled. "There are but three of the little monkeys. A pitiful adversary—"

"Three," Wentworth acknowledged, "yet they have certain tricks. . ."

Ram Singh spat out the window.

The attack came swiftly, as they swept past the corner which the Japanese had turned. Their car thunderbolted out of the darkness, going the wrong direction on a one-way street.

"They come, *sahib!* Do thou run away!" Ram Singh's voice lifted in jubilation. He jerked on the brakes and whipped open the door, sprang squarely into the path of the swiftly onrushing sedan!

Wentworth already had his own door open and slid easily behind the wheel of the Daimler. While brakes screamed on the Japanese car, he trod hard on the gas and his own powerful machine leaped from the path of destruction. He had a brief glimpse of the action in the rear vision mirror.

The Japanese, wishing to avoid an obvious murder like running down the Sikh, swung about on screaming tires to take the trail again. Ram Singh reached the running board in a long leap, wrenched open the door . . . and Wentworth whirled a corner out of sight. He reached up a steady hand to the direction finder above the front seat, and took up Marianne's trail once more. His lips were straight and solidly set, and there was cold fire in his eyes. He loved Ram Singh.

FOR Ram Singh, there were but two loves: his *sahib*, and battle. The two were so bound up with each other that it was hard to untangle one from another. But Ram Singh was certainly jubilant as he bounded to the running board of the Japanese car. He had not drawn either of the brass-hilted knives thrust into his girdle. There were only three!

As Ram Singh wrenched open the door, a small brown hand reached out to clamp down on his forearm. The Sikh's powerful hand flew open, and an oath of surprise and pain sprang to his lips. He felt himself falling off into space as the car surged into a turn. Swiftly as he had leaped, his left hand flew out and seized the wrist of the small hand that tormented him. Then he let the centrifugal force of the turn pitch him clear.

A frightened cry burst from the lips of the Japanese. Then he hurtled through the opened window!

Ram Singh struck the pavement, rolling. He carried the Japanese with him. Brakes screamed and horns wailed as other traffic whipped to a halt. Ram Singh was completely unaware of all the noise and confusion. His hand was still clamped to the wrist of the Japanese. Before the man could set himself to any of his tricks, the Sikh bounded to his feet. Ram Singh was six-feet of brawn and whip-cord, a Punjab hill fighter. His bearded face was fierce, and his great eyes burned with the love of battle. From his parted lips, laughter rolled.

He caught his balance before the Japanese could gain his, and pivoted on his heel. Gripped by that one arm, the small man was whirled violently through the air. His face was set like a graven image, and his other hand fought against the violence of his movement to reach inside his coat. A gun was there beyond a doubt. Ram Singh released his hold on the man's wrist, and the small body sailed through the air.

But the throw was not blind. Ram Singh tossed him squarely into the path of the onrushing car of the Japanese!

Even in that fury, the Japanese continued to fight. He balled his body in mid-flight, somersaulted so that he would land on his feet. He achieved balance, was slanting toward a running, somersaulting turn that would save him from the impact of the throw.

The hood of his own car caught him on the hip.

His arms and legs flew wide. His head whipped back. He bounced to the street and struck on head and shoulder and skidded a dozen feet before his feet flipped over and he rolled.

The brakes of the Japanese car were screaming. With a bellow of mirth, Ram Singh flung himself toward it!

A gun spat its ugly red flame toward him, and he heard the crack of the bullet past his ear. That pistol fired lead with the velocity of a rifle! Behind him, a man cried out hoarsely, and again. A woman screamed.

Ram Singh's next bound hurled himself behind the stalled limousine. His foot caught the rear bumper and, as a mountain climber leaps for a handhold, he went to the top of the limousine. He landed

lightly on his feet, and now his knife was in his fist. He saw the gunhand of the Japanese thrust out the window and reach upward toward him, and Ram Singh struck downward with a slashing cut that had shrewd skill and the power of his mighty shoulders behind it.

The gun leaped into the air, and Ram Singh went down over the side of the roof. He landed facing the car. His hands stabbed in through the window beside the driver. He set his shoulders and heaved, and the man came out.

He came out with a gun in his hand, and thrust it into Ram Singh's face!

Ram Singh's hands flipped upward and the gun crashed. Fury exploded in the Sikh's ears. He staggered backward, deafened, blinded. A roar of anger burst from his lips. His hands still gripped the shoulders of the Japanese. He snapped him down and up again, as a woman shakes out a light rug. The gun racketed again, but this time the bullet was nowhere near. A scream of agony burst from the Japanese chauffeur, lifted . . . and was still. Ram Singh held the limp body of the man before him, and his anger-widened eyes glared toward the car.

The man there had stemmed the flow of blood from the severed artery of his wrist.

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His good hand was presenting a gun slowly, deliberately. Easy enough to interpose the broken body Ram Singh held in his hands; easy enough, but futile. Bullets of that high velocity would pierce the body through and still strike with lethal force!

Ram Singh flipped the body toward the gunman with his left hand, and his right dived toward the sheathed knife at his hip. The movement was a blur of speed too fast for the eye to follow, and in the same split second, the knife sped from his hand, arrow-true, toward the gunman.

And the gun crashed.

Ram Singh wheeled violently about. His feet twisted and he pitched heavily to the pavement. He heard the shrillness of police whistles then.



THE radio signals which Wentworth followed died out suddenly, and his hand stabbed to the direction finder overhead. The swift whirl brought the musical note in again, now at right angles to the former course. Wentworth smiled coldly. The trail was nearing its end!

He swung onto the new course, slowing his speed, and presently he made out the coupé he was following, and the blurred shadow of the driver within. It was Marianne Jackson.

Wentworth pulled up the Daimler, reached her side in a space of seconds. She turned her small lovely face toward him with an eager smile. As always, he was struck with amazement at the weight of her golden hair. Its mass seemed too great for the dainty face, for the slender column of her throat.

"Nita called me," she said swiftly. "Ronald wasn't at home. That husband of mine never is, bless him. So I came. It was Lona Deeping I was following! She went into that private house there, the one with the neat little stylized lions on

each side of the door. She was alone."

Wentworth smiled at her while his eyes quested to the building she indicated. "Your husband must be a very busy man indeed to remain away from you so much!" he laughed.

Marianne was defending Ronald immediately, but Wentworth scarcely heard the rush of her words. His eyes were questing along the street. It was quietly rich, in the east eighties. Massive apartments were ahead on Park Avenue. Behind him were Madison and Fifth Avenue. Homes of the wealthy here. The house Marianne pointed to had quiet golden lights behind its windows, and above its canopied doorway.

Wentworth said quietly, "Best that you go home to Jackson, Marianne. Take the Daimler and leave your coupé here. Ram Singh is following. You might phone Nita."

"Is it trouble?" Marianne asked, in surprise. "I thought you were merely locating Lona for Kirkpatrick."

Wentworth's faint smile was cold. "Lona found Kirkpatrick some while ago," he said. "There is a great deal of trouble and a great deal of danger. Tell Jackson to be on guard; and to hold himself in readiness for a call. Best you should go now."

Marianne hesitated, and the firmness of her rounded jaw became more apparent. She was unaccustomed to orders, even from the *Spider*! But Wentworth's calm blue-gray eyes rested on hers, his lips still with their gentle smile. And Marianne straightened, and nodded in assent. For she had looked into the eyes of the Master of Men!

Without farther delay, she went to the Daimler and wheeled the big car away. For fully five minutes after she had gone, Wentworth waited there in the darkness, while his eyes quested over the street. He fixed its geography firmly in his mind . . . and Ram Singh did not come. Went-

worth shook his head, and the coldness crept back into his eyes. He had warned Ram Singh against the trickery of the brown men! If they had hurt the giant big-hearted Sikh. . . .

WENTWORTH thrust the thought from his mind, and alighted from the coupé. His pearl-gray gloves were careless in his hand, his *borsalino* jaunty on his head. He tucked an ivory-headed cane very carefully under his arm and strolled to the door of the house Lona Deeping had entered.

The street was no longer deserted. Three men had entered it. One had come into each of its exits, and another had stepped secretly, as he thought, into a black areaway across the street. The eyes of the *Spider* had seen him clearly.

Wentworth pressed the bell button with complete casualness. There was a small delay, then the door was swung wide. The butler was a Japanese. Wentworth stepped confidently past him, handed over cane, gloves and hat. It was curious that, just before he surrendered the cane, he gave the ivory head a little twist.

"My card to your master, please," he said.

He strolled into the reception room while the Japanese stood with blank face, holding hat and cane and gloves. His dark eyes were opaque.

Wentworth turned, his brows lifted in polite inquiry. "Perhaps you didn't understand me," he said curtly, and switched to Japanese, sharp and minatory. "Take my card at once—to Dr. Fuji!"

While the butler still stood motionless, the door opened and three men entered . . . undoubtedly the three who had been watching from the street. They were a little breathless. They ignored the butler, and their eyes fixed on Wentworth.

There was a faint whir, as of an electric motor, and Wentworth saw out of his eye corners that steel blinds were swiftly



and quietly closing over the windows.

On his right, a door opened and there were three more men there, blank of face, watching him with opaque eyes. It was as if Wentworth, pronouncing the name of Fuji, had performed some magic that conjured men out of thin air.

Wentworth stood easily, arms idle at his sides, weight evenly on his feet. The smile lingered on his lips, and the fires were high in his blue-gray eyes. But his brows still were lifted in mocking inquiry. Idly, he thumbed a black-sealed ring upon his left hand.

"This is quite a guard of honor," he said lightly. "If you are quite ready, we will go to call now on Dr. Fuji."

The butler spoke one word. It was, "*Kill!*"

The six waiting men slipped their hands beneath their coats and drew out automatic pistols. The butler slid out of sight, but his voice came back, sibilantly.

"Ready. . . . Aim. . . ."

The automatics were presented . . . and the *Spider* laughed!

CHAPTER SIX

When Gentlemen

THE *Spider* laughed and the sound was gay with mockery, and sinister. "You may fire when ready, gentlemen!" he said lightly.

And he pressed his thumb nail into a crevice in the ring upon his left hand. The black stone glowed, as if there were fire

in its depths. It revealed a slender tracery in scarlet . . . the seal of the *Spider*!

In the hallway, the butler cried out in a shrill and frightened voice, and there was a sharp and crashing explosion!

One of the three men leaped forward into the room; not as a runner leaps, but as a rag dummy might leap if someone kicked it violently in the small of the back. Another staggered sideways, his head wrenched over violently on his shoulder, went to his knees, and then slid quietly to his face. The third gripped his side with a quick hand and tried to whip his automatic back into line upon the *Spider*.

For a space of heartbeats, he struggled with the gun as if it were a living thing. And then, suddenly, he gave up the struggle. The gun tumbled from his hand with a small clatter. He tumbled down atop it.

There were a few wisps of smoke in the hallway; no more.

Those three who had stood in the other doorway were jerked about by the suddenness, the unexpectedness of the explosion. Their heads swerved that way for no more than three-fifths of a second and saw the havoc wrought among their comrades. Then their heads swung back, their guns reached out . . . and one of the men cried out in a strained and frightened voice.

He said, harshly. "The man . . . The man has disappeared!"

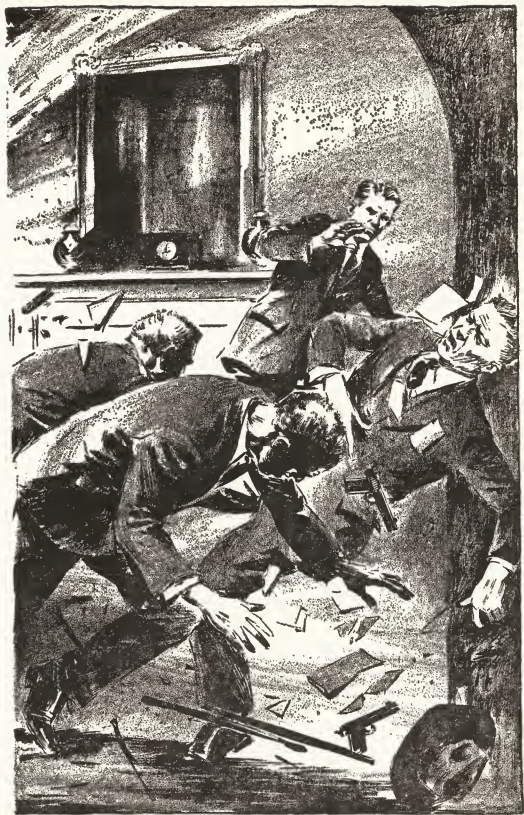
They stood there, and a faint laughter echoed in the room mocking, sinister. A trembling seized them. Men they could and would fight, any number of men, and to the death. But this man they could not see, who mocked them with laughter! . . . Their superstitious minds quivered. Their eyes slid toward each other. Suddenly, one of them jerked. His head flew up. For a full second, he stood like that. Then the stiffening went out of him, and he crumpled to the floor.

The two remaining men whirled and fled. Their voices chattered in terror.

Wentworth stepped casually out from



In the hallway . . .



there was a sharp, shattering explosion!

behind a window drape and slid an apparent fountain pen back into his pocket. The anesthetic needles it projected had come in handy more than once. He stooped over the last Japanese to fall and bound him securely with the man's own belt and shoe laces. He crossed to the hallway and looked down at the four dead men with lifted brows.

His new steel cane had fragmented neatly under the explosive blast set off by its batteries . . . and the minute electrical flash from his ring.

It had ruined his hat and gloves, of course.

The *Spider's* eyes were cold and bitter. He was not hardened to death, but these men were the enemies of his country!

He went on light feet along the hallway, following the course the fleeing gunmen had taken. He saw their guns, dropped in terror of the unseen. It was the one weakness of these intrepid fighters; that, in order to keep them faithful, they were kept in superstitious ignorance. They handled western weapons well, yet they were scarcely a generation removed from feudal terrorism that was almost savagery. A man needed to know his enemy's weaknesses!

The clatter of fleeing feet had faded down a flight of cellar steps and Wentworth took them in a single bound. He sprang at once away from the spot on which he had landed. The floor had quivered a little under his feet. He saw a trap door swing downward, slap back into place. Above it, a little pale gray dust swirled. A big, blundering fly whipped through it, buzzed and fell. The *Spider* smiled.

"You were always one to welcome your guests warmly, Dr. Fuji," Wentworth spoke quietly into the obscurity of the basement.

There was quiet for a while then until the whisper of his voice had died out. Afterward, a door opened in the far wall.

The light within was dim and pleasant. There was only the bright oblong of the door, and the pattern of light upon the floor and then a man was silhouetted there. He was naked save for a twist of cloth about his loins. He was little taller than the other Japanese, but his shoulders were enormous, and the muscles distorted the smooth line of his thighs and calves. His neck was a thick column.

The man bowed. "I think I recognize the voice of a pupil, a singularly apt pupil."

WENTWORTH straightened with a slow inward breath. "Yes, Sukimari," he said softly. "I thought you might be one of the seven gentlemen from hell! You, who have so many friends in the navy of my country, and among its prominent men! It seemed always a little strange to me that you gave so readily of your time and skill at *jiu-jitsu* to Americans . . . and to Americans only. I was, as you say, a singularly apt pupil!"

Sukimari chuckled. It made his shoulders quiver. "Will you try a few falls with me, Wentworth *san*, and promise not to disappear in the midst of them? Those ignorant ones did not know whom they welcomed in the name of the Most High. It is not so that gentleman meets gentleman, even though, as you imply, one of those gentlemen comes from hell!"

Wentworth's lips set in a stereotyped polite smile. He sucked in his breath and bowed with a click of his heels. "Or is bound for hell," he murmured.

It was not that he was deceived in the least. He had felt, more than seen, the opening of narrow ports in the dark shadowed walls. There were guns centered on him now. He was being given no choice of fighting Sukimari, or not fighting. It was merely that they wished to give him no farther chance for trickery. It was a choice in the means of dying which they offered him.

Sukimari said, softly, "Will you enter, Wentworth *san*?"

"With pleasure," Wentworth agreed.

He moved across the cellar room on wary feet that seemed casual, and his eyes scanned the floor ahead for pitfalls.

"Will you discard your clothing?" Sukimari murmured. "I would not wish even so apt a pupil to be handicapped." It was a command, reinforced by the snick of an automatic bolt being drawn behind the ramparts of the wall.

Wentworth said, "Certainly, you are kind."

He bounded forward with a hard drive of his thighs. Overhead, there was a sudden hissing gush of liquid. He smelled the hot, eating fumes of acid, heard a gun crash . . . and then he leaped toward the motionless Sukimari!

Just out of reach of the man's lifting arms, Wentworth checked. His hands crossed on his chest and two heavy automatics snouted from his fists.

"Take three steps straight backward, Sukimari," he ordered softly.

Ready as he was, Wentworth was not prepared for Sukimari's move. The stubby giant of a man, shoulders almost filling the doorway, took a step backward. Suddenly, he bounded upward, and his feet struck hard into Wentworth's chest. The guns slammed their lead harmlessly beneath his buttocks . . . and his hands clamped on Wentworth's gun wrists!

The breath was driven from Wentworth's body, but his keen brain never faltered. Sukimari always had been unconventional in his assaults and this one was no exception. But the *Spider* had been an apt pupil. He identified, even as Sukimari's feet skidded toward his throat, the leverages that were being applied. If he did not break instantly the grip on his wrists, his neck would be snapped like a dry stick! Even if that missed, the powerful fingers of the Japanese would destroy the use of his hands for many hours afterward!

Wentworth did the only thing he could. He released his guns, jerked up his knees into the small of Sukimari's back and flipped in a backward somersault. He could not achieve that, against the weight of his adversary, but he staggered free of the grip. The instant he was clear, guns crashed again. Sukimari landed lightly, whirled to the assault.

Wentworth hurled himself into the softly lighted room, whipped the door shut. Through the closing crack, Sukimari hurled himself like a thunderbolt. Their collision whipped the door shut, and Wentworth spun out of the clinch with a side slice of his hand that, had it landed solidly, would have killed Sukimari. It caught the man above the ear instead, and its violence hurled him reeling across the room. Wentworth threw the bolt on the door the instant before charging men



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slammed against it. The bolt held fast.



AS HE stood, breathing rapidly, before the door, Wentworth swiftly scanned the room. It was completely bare of any furnishings. The light filtered through thick glass plates in the ceiling. Perhaps twenty feet square, it showed no other exit than the door against which Wentworth stood; the door outside which swarmed the Japanese gunmen he had just escaped.

With quick movements, Wentworth stripped off his coat and vest, loosened his trousers. Sukimari stood against the opposite wall, and smiled.

"An excellent idea, Wentworth *san*," he whispered. "There are many tricks which I did not teach you."

"And some which you could not, since you did not know them, then or now, Sukimari," Wentworth told him, quietly. "It shall be my endeavor to instruct you, as you once so kindly taught me!"

He knew that the man planned to give him no respite, and that this instant's pause—an apparent gift from one gentleman to another—was being taken gratefully by Sukimari to recover from the effects of Wentworth's blow. The door shivered faintly under the hammering from outside. It was solid steel.

Wentworth kicked off his shoes and stood, naked, save for his shorts. His body was deeply tanned and the muscles were

smooth and sinuous beneath his skin. There were the weals of many wounds, taken in his defense of humanity, but nowhere were there any adhesions. Skillful massage had taken care of that. His skin rippled as he swung his arms wide and poised on the balls of his feet. His guns were outside. He faced a master of the most terrible form of destruction man had ever devised for the body of man, the tormenting and deadly *jiu-jitsu*.

Nor the relatively harmless types used in public wrestling; nor even those holds taught to the police. They were child's play compared to the secret punches, death blows and nerve torments known only to a selected few masters of the art. Sukimari had not taught those to Wentworth. But the *Spider* knew. It was his business to know every possible kind of attack and defense: his business as mankind's defender against the forces of evil!

The *Spider* was fighting for his life against a man of twice his brawn; his undoubted superior in strength . . . and a master in advanced *jiu-jitsu*. And the *Spider* was stripped of weapons and all trickery.

This was bare hands . . . to the death!

Nor was there any surcease if he defeated this man. He still was trapped in a room of steel outside which his enemies waited for the slaughter.

So the *Spider* laughed softly. He lifted on his toes, kicked aside his discarded clothing and flexed his arms.

"I await your salute," he said. "*Banzai*, Sukimari *san*. *Banzai* . . . you'll need it!"

"*Banzai*, Wentworth *san*," Sukimari hissed politely and came forward. The muscles rolled in knots, in writhing snakes, in oak-tree roots beneath his skin.

"*Moriturus, me salutas*," Wentworth murmured.

Sukimari paused and a frown knotted his brows. "That is the gladiators' salute to Caesar, before they went out to die,"

he said, "But the way you said it, doesn't sound quite right."

Wentworth laughed again. "I changed it a little, for your benefit, Sukimari *san*," he said. "It now declares: '*About to die, you salute me!*'"

Sukimari's smile was polite, but his eyes were bitter and hard as volcanic glass. He moved more carefully forward.

It is the essence of *jiu-jitsu* that the attacker is at a disadvantage. For the defender uses the force of the attack by means of various leverages and throws, against the man who employs it. Therefore, Sukimari moved warily.

Wentworth waited until the man was a bare two yards away, and then he hurled his body . . . at the man's legs! Sukimari bounded straight up into the air, came down with bent knees. The intent was to land on Wentworth's short ribs and crush them, with the combined impact of Wentworth's attack, and Sukimari's great weight.

WENTWORTH was on his feet as Sukimari came down, and he was in close. The conventional return to Sukimari's leap would be to bring up both clasped hands savagely under Sukimari's chin. If a wrestler were lucky, he broke his opponent's neck. But Wentworth knew better than to risk his hands against that neck of oak.

As Sukimari fell then, Wentworth smashed out with both fists to the eyes of the Japanese who was already curling into a somersaulting ball. Wentworth's fists landed solidly, but the next instant Sukimari had slapped both hands to the floor and whirled his feet about in the savage violence of a double kick.

Wentworth avoided the blow only partly. The impact caught him glancingly across the chest and rolled him on the floor. His breath was stopped in his lungs, and Sukimari bounded after him with the agility of an ape, and with a

wild animal's savagery! Once more he leaped in, both legs rigid, driving his heels hard to the groin or the *solar plexus*, for a disabling blow that would make murder easy.

And Wentworth lay helpless and flaccid upon his back!

At the last possible instant Wentworth's hands flew up and caught the ankles of Sukimari. At the same moment, he rolled violently. Sukimari's feet were whipped out from under him. His leap was converted into a crashing fall. He wrenched his feet free, balled and flipped backward in an attempt to land on his feet.

Wentworth bounded up and, once more, smashed in a heavy right and left to the eyes of his gigantic opponent.

His right landed solidly, but the hands of Sukimari met the left handed blow and Wentworth found himself jerked forward off balance across the shoulders of Sukimari! It could be a heavily telling throw, or Sukimari might clamp him there and wrench his arm from its socket!

Wentworth did not resist the pull at all. Instead he thrust forward more strongly with tensed legs and, sliding across the Japanese giant's mighty shoulders, he struck his right fist into the side of the throat.

Sukimari grunted and sagged to his knees, but Wentworth was pin-wheeled through the air to fall heavily upon his back on the bare concrete floor. His left arm hung limply from the shoulder as he staggered to his feet. Sukimari was struggling up also, and his head sagged curiously to one side. The man smiled, and sucked in his breath.

"You have learned a few lessons, Wentworth *san*," he said. "I never taught you that defense."

"But not because you didn't know it, Sukimari *san*," Wentworth said.

He seized his own left wrist and wrenched violently at the shoulder, and

felt a grating jar as the dislocation was reduced. Its every movement now would be an agony. It would swell rapidly. His back was aching from his falls. But Sukimari's neck was stiff with pain, and there was a swelling under the left eye. And blood over the right.

With the swift violence of a charging bull, Sukimari hurled himself toward Wentworth . . . and he attacked upon the left where the *Spider's* injured arm was least able to defend. Wentworth dodged aside, and his right fist jabbed one more to the eye. Sukimari wheeled in an abrupt check and snatched at the wrist, got it! Furiously Wentworth hurled himself into a flip as his arm was wrenched into a hammerlock. He broke it, came up inside Sukimari's arms. He hooked his injured left to the face . . . felt the giant's hands touch his back as light as gossamer and snap into a necklace upon his throat!

Wentworth did the only thing possible. He sagged into that necklace and drove both feet hard into the stomach of the giant. The hold was broken, but Wentworth was already weakened by its violent compression on brain arteries. He fell heavily to the floor and, with a high exultant laugh, Sukimari flung toward him. His feet drove in savagely. His hands swooped, blunt powerful fingers clawed for the death-squeeze upon the throat. It would take less than a second. Just a compression of certain nerves, and arteries . . . and a man died in sudden agony!

Wentworth seized the down-reaching wrists, but the giant's weight was a painful ton upon his belly. Wentworth could not thrust up his feet to flip the man over his head. He did the only thing he could. He froze onto the giant's left wrist and rolled on it, wrapping that arm about himself. The Japanese was rolled sideways. He doubled up his feet and drove them with vicious force against Wentworth's kidney area. His free hand cut

with the force of a mallet against the nape of Wentworth's neck. But the roll tossed him a half dozen skidding feet across the floor, and Wentworth staggered to his feet.

SUKIMARI sprang up, and there was blood upon his abraded side. He came forward, shuffling, head down, his grin distorted by the blood upon his face, too. He was a gorilla of a man, and the ferocity of a wounded gorilla was in his eyes. Wentworth retreated. He got on his bicycle, in the parlance of the prize ring. Each backward reaching stride tore pain through his kidneys; his head felt four sizes too big for his shoulder, and there was no strength in his neck. His left shoulder was swollen, and his fingers could scarcely close.

He had inflicted only minor injuries on the Japanese giant; had barely slowed him down. His only hope was that the man's left eye was nearly closed.

The *Spider's* breath was hot and dry in his throat; and his retreat was draining his strength with pain. Suddenly, he checked the retreat and sprang to the attack. Sukimari's hands lifted for a throw that would snap Wentworth's spine, and the *Spider* stopped just out of reach. He drove his heel against the man's left knee cap and, as Sukimari snatched at the ankle, Wentworth hooked his right elbow beneath the man's chin and straightened in a snapping wrench.

Sukimari howled in sudden agony, flipped over violently to prevent the full force of that wrench. His feet snapped out twice in blind kicks. Wentworth was ready for them. He snagged one of Sukimari's ankles, so that his flip was broken and the man crashed down heavily on his back. The giant's arms flew wide and, for a split-second, he was without defense. Wentworth drove his heels down in the death-dealing heart punch of *jū-jitsu*. Sukimari's shoulders heaved, and

muscles writhed into a protective armor across his chest. His hands clawed upward. Wentworth bounded clear, and Sukimari reeled to his feet!

He was staggering, weakened. His mouth was open, and there was blueness in his lips. Two men stood there, panting, seeing each other through a fog of fatigue, and pain.

They had fought to a standstill and inflicted brutal injuries upon one another . . . and neither man had yet gained the upper hand. But it was the *Spider* who was in worse condition, for Sukimari was rapidly recovering now from that stunning heart blow.

Sukimari shuffled toward the *Spider*. His hands swung, his legs were taut. Weakened, he was, but still he was a pillar of strength; still his hands had the power to maim and destroy. The *Spider's* left arm hung utterly useless now. But there was a smile on the *Spider's* lips which Sukimari tried to match, and could not. And there was high courage in his eyes.

The *Spider* laughed.

"Now, Sukimari," he said gently, "I must kill you."

Sukimari stopped and his black eyes went wide. He looked warily over the weaving, crippled *Spider*. And Sukimari laughed. The giant laughed in scorn and hatred . . . and leaped in to finish the slaughter.

It was the moment for which Wentworth had waited and maneuvered. Up to now, he had used the *jiu-jitsu* technique of opposing force with passive levers. Now, he switched his tactics.

He leaped to meet the giant!

Sukimari threw a cutting blow at the side of his throat, and the *Spider* could not dodge it. He lowered his head an inch, so that the blow did not strike the nerve center at which it had been aimed. Nevertheless, it flashed agony through his brain.

The *Spider* stepped down hard on Sukimari's foot, to nail him to the spot, and he brought up his right arm. It was not a blow with the fist. It was much shorter, and more vicious and terrible than that. He brought up his elbow. From heel to elbow, his whip-cord body was a straight line. Shoulder, thighs, and the double impact of their charge went into the blow. Sukimari could not retreat, nor even roll



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BLACK MASK

with it, for his foot was pinned to the floor by the *Spider's* weight. The blow crashed home to Sukimari's jaw.

SUKIMARI stiffened as if an electric discharge had gone through him. His head was driven sideways and back and over. A hangman's knot might wrench it so. There was a dull snap. Sukimari jerked and his whole body went flaccid. He slumped to the floor.

Wentworth dropped to his knees. His head sagged, his shoulders were bowed, and the breath came in hoarse sobs from his throat. For a long minute, and another, he knelt so. Then, heavily, he pushed himself to his feet. He looked down at Sukimari, at his curiously twisted head, and knew that Sukimari was dead.

"Sukimari *san*," Wentworth murmured in the best Japanese manner, "You have given me much pleasure. *Banzai*, Sukimari *san*."

And he heard a ripping crash, and whirled, and the door broke in . . . and there were many small men of Nippon in the doorway with guns in their fists!

The *Spider* laughed fiercely. Naked, stained with blood, he hurled himself straight at the guns of the Japanese! One of them fired, and the wind of the bullet was close and deadly. The man who shot swore in a thin and broken voice and it seemed to him that a dead and mutilated man continued to charge, though a bullet had pierced him through.

A dead man who laughed!

The Japanese dropped on limp knees

and the *Spider* had his gun and it was blasting. There were only two other men in the doorway, and it took the *Spider* a heartbeat to throw lead at them. And where the *Spider* intended his bullets to go, they struck!

He whirled and slashed down at the bowed head of the kneeling man and his way was cleared. He took two reeling steps beyond the doorway, staggered and caught his shoulder against the wall to save himself from falling.

There was a sudden brilliant light in the basement, and a man plunged down the steps; a fiercely bearded man in a *turban*. He reached Wentworth in two strides and flung a great arm about his shoulders. He glowered about him.

"*Wah, sahib!*" he rumbled, "thou hast left me no rats to kill!"

Wentworth lifted his head and saw that crimson smeared the left side of Ram Singh's uniform; saw that the Sikh was pallid with loss of blood.

"It is nothing, *sahib*," Ram Singh growled. "One of the rats bit me as I died, and I had to use their abominable car. It had no power and no speed, so it chanced that I was slow in losing the police. And so, Master, I missed this happy battle of thine."

Wentworth's smile was twisted, but it was gay. "We will search the house, warrior. Mayhap, there is still a rat with teeth."

They searched the house and they found the room where Lona Deeping had been, but no more than that. There was no other living soul in the house.

On the wall of Lona Deeping's room, Wentworth found a childish pencil scrawl. The letters were drawn painfully, as if each one had to be pulled individually from forgotten depths of the subconscious . . . and Wentworth knew that Lona Deeping's real self was struggling upward, trying, fighting.

The message was only four words:



"She will die graciously."

The signature was a lop-sided face and there were tears beneath the mourning eyes. Eight tears.

Abruptly, Wentworth's head snapped up. *She will die graciously.*

He whirled toward the door, and his left arm flapped grotesquely at his side. "Ram Singh," he rasped. "Ram Singh, the *missie sahib* is in fearful danger! Get me to her as fast as that crippled car of yours can move!"

There could be no question at all in his mind. It was Nita van Sloan whom Lona Deeping meant. Nita van Sloan who would meet . . . *the gracious death!*

CHAPTER SEVEN

Graciously . . .

TWO madmen raced through the streets of New York in a stolen, blood-stained car. One of them, naked to his shorts, sat rigidly and cradled a useless, swollen arm. The other, a bullet hole through his shoulder, sat tautly over the wheel and swore at the sixteen cylinders which would not deliver enough power, enough speed.

In her apartment, Nita van Sloan listened to the occasional whisper of a police call over the radio. Through the window her eyes stared unseeingly at the dark river that flowed below, whose glistening breast reflected the shimmer of speeding lights.

She was alone, and waiting. So many hours of her life were spent this way while the man she loved fought against impossible odds—and won. But a man could not always win. Not even such a man as Richard Wentworth. Some day a plan would slip; some day a lucky bullet would fly from a dark alley.

Nita shuddered and pushed herself to her feet, paced restlessly across the room. A cigarette . . . her purse was there on

the table in the foyer. But she saw the cigarette box on the coffee table and stopped there, searched absently for a match. She was going once more toward her purse in the hall, but there was a packet on the mantel. She lighted up and stood, frowning at nothing.

She was a lovely woman, with chestnut curls clustered about the delicate oval of her face; violet eyes large and kindly beneath the winged arches of her brows. She looked down at her cigarette absently. Something was prodding at her brain; some forgotten thing, and she could not call it to mind. It was exactly as if some one were prompting her to do something; prompting her in a language she could not understand. A curious feeling.

She turned impatiently from the fireplace and stood facing the foyer. She had had these sensations before. Sometimes, they came from Dick Wentworth. So closely were their minds attuned that often she could catch his thoughts. But she did not sense that this prompting came from Dick. Furthermore, she did not like it.

She looked about her. Her eyes focused on the purse on the foyer table, and the pressure in her brain abruptly increased. Her eyes tightened a little at the corners, but she stood solidly. Then she turned away from the foyer as if against a solid wall, and went back to the windowseat from which she could look out at the dark beauty of the Hudson.

She knew that, presently, she would go out there and pick up her purse. It was ridiculous to feel as she did about it. Was she imagining things out of her fears for Dick Wentworth?

In the rear of the apartment a door opened and closed. Nita pulled about sharply, then laughed. It was her maid, of course; Marie, her maid. It was time for her to be returning to duty.

Presently, the girl came in and courtesied from the doorway. "Does ma'am-

selle require anything before I retire?"

Nita smiled and shook her head. "Have a pleasant evening, Marie?"

The girl dimpled, and set about putting in order the few things that Nita had displaced. Nita looked back out the window again, trying to capture that illusive thought that kept brushing her mind. She knew there was something wrong; something. . . .

She did not see Marie pick up her hat and purse and go toward the sleeping quarters; nor did she know that Marie had a weakness for her special brand of Russian cigarettes with which Dick Wentworth kept Nita supplied.

IN THE bed room, Marie put the hat carefully away and shot a look toward the door. With a small smile, she opened Nita's purse and took out cigarettes and matches. Ma'amselle would not mind if she smoked just one before she made things ready for the night. Marie was sure that ma'amselle would not mind.

She tucked a cigarette between her pink, curved lips, and picked up the box of matches. . . . She was smiling, thinking of the man with whom she had passed the evening. He was a funny boy. Some day she might weaken and marry him. She was not even looking down at the match box when, with one slender finger, she pushed out the tray while she dipped into the opening for a match.

Marie uttered a little cry and looked down at her hand. She smothered a scream then, and let the box fall from her fingers. She popped her finger into her mouth, because it hurt. She backed rapidly away from the fallen thing. Out of the box, something red and bloated crawled. It was not large, but it was awful to look at. Its body was red, spotted with black, and it had long hairy legs—eight of them. It was a spider! And the thing had bitten her!

Marie felt alarm race through her as she stared from the hideous thing to her finger. There was a tiny pin-prick of red there, but now it didn't hurt at all. She ran into the bathroom, found iodine and daubed it on the bite.

She was trembling. There was a curious anger in her heart. In the name of heaven, why did ma'amselle carry a spider in her matchbox! It did not make sense. Women did not do such things. Had the thing perhaps crawled into the matchbox when it was partly opened, and ma'amselle merely popped it into her pocketbook without knowing it?

Marie bit her lips and stared intently at the tiny wound. It was not a thing one could tell ma'amselle. After all, she had opened the purse without permission. It would be nothing. It amounted to nothing.

She went back into the bedroom and carefully picked up the matchbox and put it back in the purse. The spider, she did not see. She went carefully out of the bedroom. She still felt cold inside, except that there were little prickles like fire running over the surface of her skin. Like tiny spider legs. But that was the reaction, of course. She was frightened, that was all.

"That's all it is," she said. "I'm frightened."



RAM SINGH drove furiously and, belatedly, Wentworth pulled on his clothing, snatched from the floor as they left the house of death. When the car howled to a halt with smoking tires, Wentworth flung to the pavement.

"Get rid of that car," he snapped at Ram Singh, and hurled himself toward the apartment building.

The hall boy had a frantic glimpse of a disheveled man, and then Wentworth popped into the elevator and it was speed-



DR. FUJI

ing upward. Minutes later, he was at Nita's door. Impatiently, he jabbed the bell. He waited, and jabbed again.

Nita van Sloan opened the door, a frown between her brows. "I don't know why Marie didn't answer the bell," she said. "If I had known it was you. . ."

Wentworth swept her into the curve of his good arm, and his eyes quested hungrily over her face. She blushed a little under his gaze; under the fervor of his kiss.

"Why, Dick," she murmured. "Perhaps it's as well that Marie *didn't* answer the door!"

Wentworth still held her close while his eyes swept over the apartment. "Did any of those Japanese touch you," he asked harshly, "when you were stopped?"

"One of them took my gun away," Nita said slowly, and instantly Wentworth had her right hand in his and looked at it closely. He didn't know what he was looking for. He had only seen the victims of the gracious death—not the way in which it was inflicted.

Nita van Sloan felt the slow onset of fear. "Whatever is the matter, Dick?" she whispered. "They didn't harm me. They just took my purse so as to identify me, and then gave it back."

"Where is your purse?" Wentworth demanded.

Nita shook her head, "You're a mad-man. Marie put it away, I believe."

Wentworth relaxed with a small, forced laugh. "We'll take your purse with tongs and drop it in the deepest water we can find," he said. "You were threatened. Lona left a warning written on the wall of her room. But apparently, you have prevented its happening in some way. We'd better get the purse, and. . ." He frowned. "I don't suppose Marie would open your purse for any reason?"

"I'm sure she wouldn't," Nita told him crisply.



Wentworth shook his head. "We'll go see. Ring for her."

Nita crossed to a bell, rang, and from the service section, a woman screamed in agony!

Down the hallway, Wentworth raced. At each beat of his feet, there was a fresh scream. When he hit the kitchen door the piercing quality of the cry seemed to cut his eardrums. In a corner of the kitchen Marie was huddled with her palms pressed hard over her ears, and her eyes stretched wide in pain.

"Don't speak," she whispered. "Don't whisper. My ears. . ."

Wentworth heard the emphatic tap of Nita's heels, and saw quivers shake the girl at each sound. Her eyes were closed now; her head turned down from the light. Wentworth flung out a hand to check Nita while his eyes swept the room again and again. He could see nothing, but this girl was in torment. It was apparent that all her senses were keyed up tremendously, so that every sound was an agony; so that even the light was an unbearable torment to her eyes.

"Get a doctor at once," Wentworth called over his shoulder. "She seems to have been drugged in some curious way."

The girl screamed, "No!"

Wentworth spoke softly to the girl, "Try to be calm, Marie," he said. "We must take care of you."

The girl quivered and rocked at every spoken word. Her whole body was like that. She whispered, "No, I am not drugged. It was the spider. The red spider. . ."

NITA stared up into Wentworth's face, and he frowned and shook his head. Impossible to tell what the girl meant. She seemed to be accusing him of some crime; or was she seeing things from behind the veil of her closed eyes? Slowly, shudders swept over the girl's body. At Wentworth's sharp gesture, Nita turned and raced for a telephone.

The girl said, in a strangled voice, "I can't stand it. I can't stand it!"

She was straightened up now, and she lifted one foot from the floor, and then the other. Her face was twisted, her eyes still tightly shut. She winced at each faint sound that swelled through the apartment. Abruptly, she kicked off her shoes. Her voice rose more shrilly, "I can't stand it! Oh, God, it was the spider! I can't. . ."

Her voice was a scream now, utterly incoherent. She danced in a torment that had no visible cause. Her hands clawed

at her body. She began to rip off her clothing. Wentworth understood then the torment that wracked her. It was not only that ears and eyes had become super-sensitive, but her every sense was stepped up tremendously. It was the touch of her clothing, the slight weight of the silk she wore that was driving her mad!

In a single stride, Wentworth reached the tormented girl. Mercifully, he prodded a nerve center in her throat and dropped her unconscious to the floor. Even as she lay there, she twitched and shivered. Nita came bursting back into the kitchen.

"What is it, Dick?" she asked anxiously. "Oh, what has happened to Marie?"

Wentworth said, harshly, "I think that she has been stricken by the death intended for you, I think that she is, as the Japanese put it, dying graciously! Every sense has been made superlatively acute. It is like those devils! *Graciously* . . . because in this condition, she will be more

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subject to the beauties that can come to us by the senses! Oh, those fiends!"

He bent over and swept the girl into his arms. "Fill the tub with luke-warm water," he said shortly. "We can at least relieve her of the feeling of pressure all over her body. She must be floated in the water. That doctor. . ."

"Is on the way," Nita said, her voice strained. "But, Dick, how is it caused?"

Wentworth shook his head bitterly. "I do not know, my dear. I only know that the final stage is idiocy. I have seen its victims dancing and prancing in an ecstasy of idiocy until they dropped into a deep coma and died. I never before understood the reason!"

They did what they could for the maid, and the doctor stared in bewilderment and listened to the symptoms. "Never heard of anything like it," he said. "Most curious. Most strange indeed. I hesitate to use opiates, without some knowledge of what is happening. Yet you tell me that the girl is in agony when she is conscious."

But he did use opiates when the screams rang out again, and Marie spoke only one word before she died, one word that she said over and over again.

"Spider!" she chattered. "Spider . . . spider . . . spider-spider-spider. . ."

The doctor said, grimly. "Of course, I'll have to report this to the police. It seems the girl has been murdered by the *Spider!*"

Nita said, jerkily, "Or perhaps has been bitten by a spider?"

The doctor shrugged. "I know of no insect stinging that could cause this torment. You'll pardon me while I phone."

When he had left the room, Nita whirled toward Wentworth and her face was drawn with anger. "You can't keep me out of this, Dick. You understand? You can't keep me out of this! My poor Marie!"

Wentworth took her shoulders in his hands and his eyes were gentle. "My dear," he said, "you are never out of it! It is the curse of my work . . . and my delight!"

They looked at each other through a long minute and then, slowly, steadily, they smiled. Nita lifted her lips to his kiss.

AFTERWARD, she told him her plan. "Marianne Jackson and I know more about Lona Deeping than any one else," she said. "We know the kind of clothing she likes, her cosmetics, her perfumes . . . and she is very particular! Through those, I am sure we can get a lead to her sooner or later. I'll call Marianne. We'll canvass the city!"

"Fine," Wentworth agreed, "on one proviso, my dear. You will no longer occupy this apartment. Marie's cry of 'spider' may have been planted in her brain by the cunning Dr. Fuji to throw blame upon me—or she may have been bitten by some special fiendish pet of Fuji himself! It may still be here."

"We will go to Jackson's place," he concluded, "and at once, without waiting for the police. I want to have a little talk with him. . ."

Nita's eyes widened, but she pressed her lips firmly together, and said nothing. But she knew that when Dick Wentworth called on Ronald Jackson the fight was growing bitter and close! Or else desperate. He was conscientious about not disturbing Jackson since his marriage to Marianne, unless Jackson's aid was needed urgently.

Nita caught her sigh, and pressed down her anxieties which never were far below the surface when Wentworth went upon the business of the *Spider!*

"Very well, Dick," she said. "We'll go at once."

Within an hour Wentworth was speed-

ing northward from Jackson's home with both Ram Singh and Jackson in the car. His injured shoulder was bound and they ghosted along in the superlatively powerful Daimler which he had lent to Marianne.

"I left a Japanese bound and a prisoner in the house," the *Spider* told his two comrades-at-arms quietly. "All others in that house were slain. It was well sound-proofed. I doubt that the police have gone there. I hope that none of Fuji's other men has."

Jackson turned his broad loyal face toward him. "If I get you right, major, you're going to take this boy and give him the works to make him talk." His wide jaw set solidly.

Wentworth smiled faintly, and shook his head. "Not at all, Jackson," he said. "When the men of Fuji come, they will find an entirely different Japanese there, bound hand and foot. . . . Ram Singh, there is a kennel two blocks ahead where they keep some superlative hounds for rent. Stop there, Jackson, at that corner drug store purchase a pint of valerian."

Jackson peered at him with puzzled eyes, but Wentworth only smiled quietly . . . and the car stopped and the two men went about the errands Wentworth had given them. They swung along together, with a military stride, the tall Sikh and the broad shouldered Jackson.

"I don't like the smell of it," Jackson growled. "The major is going to take another of his long chances."

"*Wah!*" Ram Singh jeered at him. "And you do not like long chances, do you, my white-skinned friend. Such battles as I have fought this night!"

Jackson grunted. "When real trouble comes, the major always sends for me. I hope you've noticed that, fat-head. You're all right for a battle or two—"

"I'll have your heart!" Ram Singh rumbled.

"I'll have to take your liver," Jackson snapped. "You don't have any heart."

The two men swung about, scowling fiercely at each other, and slowly their eye corners crinkled and they bellowed laughter into each other's face. Jackson clapped Ram Singh on the shoulder and each swaggered off to his separate errand. They were fierce rivals in the service of Richard Wentworth; and either would lay down his life for his friend.

THEY swung back together and Ram Singh had a straining beagle hound on a leash, and Jackson had the pint bottle of valerian. They came to the Daimler, and Ram Singh swore, his hand flashing to his knife; Jackson's automatic somersaulted into his fist with a speed that nearly rivalled the swiftness of the *Spider's* draw.

From the back seat, a Japanese smiled at them, and hissed politely!

"*Bansai*, Jackson *san*," he said with a lisping precision. "*Bansai*, prince of the Sikhs."

Jackson whipped open the door and his gun was in line, ready. "Look, you brown monkey," he said, harshly.

Behind his shoulder Ram Singh glowered . . . but the beagle clambered in and fawned upon the Japanese . . . and then the Japanese was laughing. And it was the voice of Richard Wentworth!

"I guess," he said cheerfully, "that the disguise will do!"



Ram Singh rumbled, "*Wah*, thou didst not fool me. Only this thick-headed Jackson. . ."

Jackson spat eloquently into the gutter. "It was Ram Singh's wildness that threw me off."

Wentworth laughed at them both with affection while the men scowled at each other again. "Listen, both of you," he said quietly. "You know now what I intend to do. I will take the place of the bound Japanese in the house. You will hold the man prisoner, get him to talk if you can, though I doubt it. With this valerian, I will leave a trail. You will follow, but not too closely, by means of the dog. Once you have trailed me to . . . wherever they take me . . . we will know how to strike!"

Ram Singh's teeth flashed through the thickness of his black beard. "*Wah!* There will be more fighting!"

Jackson said, worriedly, "I don't like it, major. Instead of taking you away, Fuji being the sort of man he is, they may just slit your throat while you lie there tied hand and foot!"

Wentworth said, gravely, "Yes, that is a possibility, though usually Fuji prefers more involuted forms of death."

"Then listen, major, let me. . ."

"But *sahib*, thy servant. . ."

Wentworth shook his head. "No, my friends, the risk is mine. You two will be my defense. Let us go, please, and swiftly."

Reluctantly, Ram Singh and Jackson climbed into the Daimler and it sped northward once more toward the house where Wentworth would masquerade as a Japanese. He comprehended more of his danger than did his two helpers. He knew that, because of his size alone, the discovery of the imposture was sure to be quick. But he counted also on whoever discovered to conceal that fact and take him, a prisoner, to Fuji!

So he took a double risk of death and took it willingly, for it was imperative that Fuji be stopped before he could set his machinery of death and destruction to work upon America! So far, there had been only skirmishes among the patrols, but the main battle could not be far ahead . . . the battle when Fuji struck, and struck terribly, at the country Wentworth loved and served!

Wentworth looked at his two comrades and sensed their grim readiness. He nodded and settled back against the cushions, relaxing for his own hour of struggle.

This night the *Spider* would walk once more, and his comrade would be . . . Death!

CHAPTER EIGHT

Slaves of Fuji

BY WAY of the roof, Richard Wentworth entered the house where he had fought so fiercely against the forces of Fuji. In the topmost hallway, he pressed close against the wall while, with sharpened ears, he listened to the sounds of the house. •

If any of the Japanese had returned here, they would have deduced at once from the fact that one of their number was alive and bound, that his captor planned to return. It would be easy, so easy, to lay a trap. Wentworth remembered, with narrowed eyes, the gas that had come so close to destroying Kirkpatrick; and the death of Marks, the F.B.I. man, who had been "torn to bits." And the death of Marie.

Yes, Dr. Fuji had brought his pets of destruction along with him!

So Wentworth listened through long minutes, and got the "feel" of the house. It felt empty, deserted, abandoned.

He crept down the steps as soundlessly as might the creature whose name he bore. Each flight he descended only far

enough to clear the ceiling. Then he vaulted silently over the bannister to the hall below. Stairs he knew, were favorite places for the traps of the East.

Once a step gave slightly under his foot and he leaped the entire length of the flight! Behind him he heard a faint hiss, and a sharp crunching thud! The speck of light he released from his pocket torch showed a tiny steel dart buried to half its length in the wooden bannister. It was coated with a purplish brown gum . . . and there was no doubt that it was poisoned!

Once a section of the bannister quivered beneath his hand, and Wentworth

shoe laces. He disposed the bottle of valerian in such a way that, with loosened stopper, it would slowly drip its contents. Then he lay down as comfortably as possible on the floor. For a few minutes he stared toward the ceiling above him. But he saw nothing, because steel shutters over the windows excluded all light.

There, alone in the dark, the *Spider* admitted to himself that he had taken an extremely desperate measure to reach Fuji. But other courses were almost certain to fail. He laughed softly. He was delivering himself, bound hand and foot, to the enemy. And the only weapon he could allow himself was his brain.

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hurled himself backward and heard the swishing sigh as steel whipped through the air. There had been a sword blade concealed in the bannister!

So, eventually, the *Spider* reached the first floor and there was a set smile on his grim face.

From the hallway, he peered cautiously into the room where he had left his prisoner. No sound of breathing there. He shook his head, released a tiny ray from his torch—and instantly extinguished it!

The grim smile on his lips tautened.

His prisoner was still there, but he had preferred not to wait, alive, either for his captor or for his master to find him!

He had managed to cut his own throat by smashing a pier mirror with his head!

More terribly than any words, the man's immolation further indicated the fearful power of Dr. Fuji.

Swiftly, the *Spider* stripped off the bonds of the dead man; bound himself in similar fashion with his own belt, his own

The *Spider* thought this over briefly, with a shrug of shoulders to the danger he faced. And then he composed himself and went to sleep!



NIGHT and day were indistinguishable in the pitch-black room, but the faint rumble of heavy street traffic told the *Spider* that it was daylight when he awakened. It was not that sound which had aroused him, however. He heard, faintly, the fall of a footstep. He placed it instantly.

Someone had just entered by the basement!

Wentworth stretched himself against his bonds. He was stiff and sore, both from the beating he had taken at the hands of Sukimari, and from his night's sleep on the hard floor. But he was inured to hardship. He was rested, and his keen brain was alert!

He waited until the footsteps were

clearly audible in the hall and then he called out, harshly, in Japanese:

"Brothers! I am here—bound! Free me!"

Two men stepped into the doorway, visible in the backwash of their flash-lights. They were the small, impassive men of Japan, and their lights sought him out and held him implacably. There was a glitter as one of them drew a knife.

The two marched toward him with the steadiness of soldiers . . . or executioners.

Was the knife to free him—or kill him?

"Slow you were," Wentworth jibed at them. "These long hours I have lain here and waited, and you did not come. Is everyone in the house dead? Can you not hear the cries of a helpless one?"

The lights were blinding in his eyes, and the men stood directly over him. The knife was a cold glitter in the fist of one of them. He stooped over and Wentworth caught the opaque shine of his eyes. The man intended to kill him!

Wentworth gathered his muscles for the roll which could be his only prompt defense, and the other man spoke:

"Wait, Koto."

Instantly, the man with the knife turned his head and burst into vehement speech. "Our orders are plain. Death to those who fail! This man has failed! He alone in the house is alive. He lay passively and waited to be freed instead of liberating himself and calling us!"

The other man leaned over sharply and thrust the light very close to Wentworth's face and the one called Koto sucked in a sharp hissing breath. Then they stood and stared down at the *Spider* . . . and Wentworth knew that his disguise had been penetrated. There must have been some sign, some mark, unknown to him by which these men recognized each other. And he did not wear it!

Koto said, softly, "Now, surely, he must die!"

"Surely," the other agreed, "but not by our hands! We will take him to . . . the *Samurai*!"

Koto stooped with a swift movement and, before Wentworth more than sensed his intent, the hilt of the dagger was striking violently at his temple! The *Spider* had only a moment to realize that, unconscious, he could not dribble out the valerian by which Ram Singh and Jackson were to trail him. He attempted to twist his head aside to gain a moment's respite; to squirm so that the stopper would be loosened in the bottle . . . and the dagger hilt struck him solidly on the temple.

In an explosion of pain and light, the *Spider* lost consciousness!



DR. FUJI sat on a silken mat in the super-heated plant room and looked with blank eyes upon the rows of growing things. He was completely alone and his yellow eyes with the vertical pupils gazed at nothing at all. A slow smile stirred the wrinkles about his mouth, and his lids drooped.

He looked a benevolent old man, drowsing in senile contentment beneath the artificial sunlight of the overhead lamps. That, mind you, was when his eyes were closed.

Chimes sounded dimly and then three slow beats upon a gong. It whirled into full resonance, died lingeringly. Dr. Fuji reached out and stroked a slender jade vase beside him, and it rang a silvery note.

Plainly operated by that single pure tone, a door slid open in the opposite wall and the Japanese who, with Koto, had taken the *Spider* prisoner, stepped into the room and flung himself down on his face.

The yellow eyes swung toward the man and then Dr. Fuji nodded in content-

ment, though no word had been spoken.

"Bring in the prisoner," he ordered.

The two Japanese crawled across the plantroom with hanging heads, and dragged the unconscious Wentworth between them until he lay, bound and helpless, before the mat of the old man.

Dr. Fuji sucked in a slow breath and his lips pursed in and out in pleasure. "You have done well," he said softly. "You may go."

Not until the two men had made their exit did the old Japanese stir. He clapped his withered palms softly together, and two doll-like women glided into the room and threw themselves prostrate before him. In response to his commands, they rolled Wentworth over on his back, and one of them slit his trouser leg with a minute razor, and slid a hypodermic needle into his thigh. Then, they went away.

Dr. Fuji continued to smile blankly at his flowers. His head moved slowly, and he blinked with pleasure now upon one twisted dwarf of a forest giant, then another. It was conspicuous that all the forms were distorted; even horrible.

Presently, almost casually, he looked down at Richard Wentworth, and it was as if a film had been lifted from his eyes. Their yellow depths glowed with the fires of hell.

He said, "Slave, open thy eyes!"

Woodenly, as if motivated by some force external to himself, Wentworth opened his eyes. Dr. Fuji leaned forward so that the yellow glare of his gaze peered deeply into those of the *Spider*.

Through a space of a minute, unblinkingly, Dr. Fuji looked into Wentworth's eyes. The *Spider* was still unconscious, from the drug, from the blow on the head. His eyes held no light, no reason. Slowly, Dr. Fuji's forehead knotted into a frown. It was tremendously muscled, so that it stood out in ridges of concentration.

"Fool!" hissed Dr. Fuji, "do you think you can resist me!"

His hands reached out and the bony, clawed fingers clamped on nerve centers. Wentworth shivered. His head lifted, still woodenly, and the glare of the cat-like eyes burned more directly into his; burned and widened. The slit pupils opened until the yellow iris was almost obscured. The muscles in the temples of the *Spider* began to writhe.

With an angry exclamation, Dr. Fuji snapped his hands from the neck of the *Spider* and the clawed fingernails reached toward an eye. It was plainly an effort for the man to restrain himself. Yet he did. He leaned back and breathed deeply, hissing, between his pursing lips. Slowly, he smiled.

"Now, slave, I know who you are," he whispered. "Unconscious, drugged, your

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will still can resist mine! There can be only one man such as you in America . . . him they call Master of Men!" Dr. Fuji laughed, and the sound was sibilant and thin.

Dimly, the *Spider* heard that laughter, and revulsion stirred in his soul. He sighed, and his head rolled, but his eyes did not close. He knew that he was in the presence of horror, and that his will was battling. He knew no more than that.

Dr. Fuji was leaning forward again, and his eyes seemed to expand until there was nothing of his face visible at all. Simply those eyes, boring, commanding, compelling.

"Speak, slave," whispered Dr. Fuji. "Who are you?"

Wentworth's lips moved and he heard himself, as if a stranger spoke, saying, "I am Richard Wentworth, ma . . . mas . . ."

"You cannot resist me, slave," whispered Dr. Fuji. "Say it!"

"I am Richard Wentworth, Master."

Dr. Fuji laughed again. "Ten minutes!" he said wonderingly. "A white man's brain has resisted mine for ten minutes! I compliment you, Richard Wentworth. But before Dr. Fuji, you are weak. You are without resistance. Say it, slave."

"I am weak. I am . . . without resistance."

THE flicker of consciousness that had stirred for a moment in Wentworth's brain went out, and he spoke as an automaton speaks. Fingers of will were prodding his nerve centers, and his lips answered. It was not Richard Wentworth who answered. It was a drugged, unconscious and hypnotized consciousness that had no contact with Wentworth.

"I have an order to lay upon you, slave," whispered Dr. Fuji, and his fingers went once more to those control centers in the nape of Wentworth's neck.

"I await, Master."

"It is important, slave, that tonight the police should be disorganized, so that if any of our samurai escape destruction, they may escape the police. You will help to disorganize the police. You will help our samurai."

Wentworth's wooden lips emitted: "I will disorganize the police. I will help our samurai."

Dr. Fuji's thin lips curved deeply so that the stumps of his teeth showed, yellow and brown.

"You will kill Stanley Kirkpatrick on sight, slave!"

"I will . . ."

"You will kill Stanley Kirkpatrick on sight, slave. He is thy master's enemy!"

"My master's enemy. I will . . ."

"Thou stubborn fool!" Dr. Fuji's voice rose harshly. "Repeat after me: 'I will kill Stanley Kirkpatrick on sight. He is my master's enemy!'"

Wentworth's face twisted and the muscles writhed in his temples. Between his eyes, a vein became congested and dark.

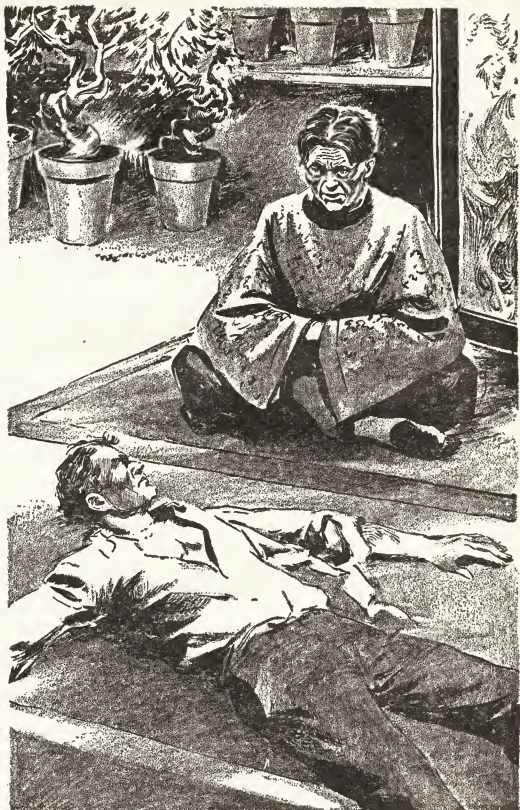
"I will kill . . . Stanley . . . Kirkpatrick on sight. He is . . . He is my master's enemy!"

Dr. Fuji smiled slowly. "When you awake, you will remember nothing of this, slave. You will remember nothing of this until you see Stanley Kirkpatrick. And then you will remember that you are my slave . . . and that he must die!"

Wentworth said faintly, "I will remember nothing . . . until I see Stanley Kirkpatrick . . . who must die!"

Dr. Fuji waited for a while after that, while Wentworth lay like a log. Dr. Fuji rested and wondered. As old and powerful a practitioner of hypnotism as himself needed rest! And after struggle with the will of a drugged and unconscious white man. Dr. Fuji looked down at Wentworth and respect was in his face, and caution.

"After that, my slave," Dr. Fuji murmured, "I think you would better kill



"Slave," Wentworth heard Dr. Fuji saying, "you will kill Stanley Kirkpatrick!"

yourself. Yours is not a brain, or a will, I care to have in the world . . . as my opponent!"

He rested, and presently, he went over his instructions again, and again, until they were graven deep in the subconscious mind of Richard Wentworth. The resistance was lessened now, as the drugs took tighter and tighter hold. Finally, Dr. Fuji nodded in satisfaction, and once more clapped his hands lightly together.

The doll women dragged Wentworth to the outer portal, which opened to the soft clear note of the glass vase, and turned him over to the men who kow-towed there.

"When he awakes," they repeated the instructions of Dr. Fuji, "he is to be released, in such a way that he seems to escape. He is now a slave of the master, and he has an important work to do, but this he does not know," the order ran on. "So he is not to be harmed in his escape, nor until further word. It is an order."

"It is an order," the men repeated.

The door slid closed and Richard Wentworth was carried away, still bound hard and fast, to sleep off the effects of the drug . . . and to awake to a horror which he would not remember. . . .



CHAPTER NINE

Tunnels of Death

WHEN Wentworth recovered consciousness, he was in complete blackness. He moved in stiff befuddlement and there were no bonds upon

his wrists or ankles. He lay motionless then through long moments while he sought to orient himself. His consciousness told him that a long time had elapsed; the fogginess of his brain told him that he had been not only knocked on the head, but also drugged.

Warily, he thrust himself to his feet and stood, weaving, in darkness. Logically, he was still a prisoner of Dr. Fuji. Since his bonds were removed, he must be in some sort of cell. He took slow steps forward, hands before him, and felt the coldness of a steel wall. He explored that wall up and down. The ceiling was just over his head. It, too, was steel—and so was the floor!

Through a space of two breaths, Wentworth stood motionless while his heavy brain absorbed these facts. Then he began a circuit of the room. It didn't take long. The cell into which he had been put was no more than six feet by nine, and two or three inches higher than his own six feet.

He made the slow circuit, and stopped with a frown knotting his forehead. There appeared to be no door or window in the walls! Religiously, then, he criss-crossed the ceiling until he had explored every inch of it . . . and there was no opening there, either!

Wentworth shook his head and stood, motionless, in the middle of the cell. His feet had explored the floor as his hands the ceiling. And the walls had shown no break. He sat down on the floor to think.

There was no way of telling whether Ram Singh and Jackson were nearby. They would not act until he somehow signaled his need. Such were their standard orders. He must face the possibility—no, the probability—that they were nowhere within signalling distance. They were depending on following the trail of valerian with the dog. He had been knocked out before he could make sure of loosening the stopper in the bottle.

He shook his head. He must get out under his own power.

Then it was necessary to know whether or not he already had been taken before Dr. Fuji.

At the thought of the aged Japanese, Wentworth felt a faint sensation of horror. His jaw muscles clamped in rigidity. This feeling, and the reaction, had no basis that he knew. Apparently, he was bracing himself for resistance . . . against the mention of Fuji's name!

Yet he could remember nothing!

A faint shudder traced its way along Wentworth's nerves. He drew up his legs in the manner taught by the Yogi of India, and began to breathe in a quick rhythmic way. It was necessary for him to tap his subconscious mind, and he knew no better way, short of submitting to hypnotism, than the concentration taught in Yoga.

He directed his thoughts toward Dr. Fuji, and beyond that he blanked out his mind, waiting for what fleeting impressions would rise from his subconscious. And nothing came. He caught a flash of Dr. Fuji's face, but he identified the memory merely as connected with his meeting the evil samurai in Japan.

The perspiration began to bead Wentworth's forehead as he pressed for memory. His body, posited in the approved lotus seat, ceased to exist. He felt power surging through him like currents of electricity—but it brought no memories!

It was then that Wentworth knew, and the thought snapped him to his feet with the suddenness of violent pain. Beyond a doubt, he had seen Fuji! But he had been hypnotically commanded to forget that meeting! In no other way could the meeting have failed to impinge to some extent on his subconscious. His conviction that he had been drugged was a logical support of that theory.

WENTWORTH was not a man who knew fear in the sense that ordinary humans knew fear. But at the thought that he had been under the

hypnotic influence of Dr. Fuji, he knew a coldness like crawling things along his spine! Except for his abbot-instructor in far Tibet, Wentworth knew of no living man who could put him under hypnotic influence against his will! From the feeling of resistance in his body, he knew that he had fought Fuji. From the fact that he could not remember, he knew that he had submitted.

Drugs and the blow on the head undoubtedly had weakened his powers, but he knew that Fuji must be potent indeed so to have conquered over him.

He knew, with an inward shrinking that was own cousin to horror, that some hypnotic command had been put upon his subconscious.

The *Spider* shivered . . . and snapped his thoughts away from Fuji, and the horror that he knew must have been perpetrated while he lay helpless. Since his practice of Yoga could not reveal to him what had happened, there was only one other recourse. He must submit his will to Eastern hypnotism. Ram Singh was the only practitioner who might have sufficient power to wrest the secret from his subconscious. And even he might fail.

The only release from the hypnotic command, perhaps, would come . . . *with Dr. Fuji's death!*

Quickly, Wentworth brought himself under control. He put from him all farther thought on that problem, and turned to the matter of freeing himself from the cell of steel. It was, he told himself easily, merely a matter of logic. He lay on the floor, and the cell was exactly six feet wide. He added his belt, thirty-six inches long, to his height . . . and the cell was exactly nine feet long. Yet the *height* was six feet, plus a few inches.

"Could it possibly be," Wentworth murmured, with a snile, "that the height of the cell is adjustable to its occupant?"

Wentworth thought that it was. At any rate, that would do for a starting point.

Since there was no opening within the walls of the cell itself, then some one of the six faces of the cell must be moveable. . . .

A brief exploration with his fingertips told Wentworth that the ceiling was welded solidly to the side walls . . . but around the edge of the floor, there was a break. Extremely slim, but still a break. He knew then, without question, that he had discovered a way out of the cell. The floor operated like the plunger of a pump in the square of the cell. Probably, at will, it could be caused to rise and crush the unfortunate who was within it. That might be the fate that was in store for him . . . if he could not escape!

It was comparatively easy, once he had fathomed the secret of the cell, to force a way out. Obviously, his captors counted more on mystification than on strength. He crawled about on his knees until he found a solid obstruction in the crack against the wall. A slim piece of steel, carried always in the sole of his shoe, sufficed to spring the block, and the floor settled with a soft whistling of escaping air to the bottom of the shaft. The door was secured with a spring lock, and once more the sliver of steel came into play.

And the *Spider* stood, free, in a dark and narrow corridor!

Wary as a wild thing, he stood and sniffed the air of the passage. From one direction there came the faint clack of voices speaking Japanese. From the other, the solid, muted jar of passing traffic, overhead! The *Spider* turned first toward the latter sound!

The corridor twisted several times but the superb directional sense of the *Spider* enabled him to keep perfect track of his movements. There was a strange absence of traps along the tunnel. Four separate times he thought he caught the muted click of released trap mechanism and bounded aside, but nothing happened. It was as if the traps had been locked so they could not be sprung!

Wentworth recorded that impression grimly, and linked that with his conviction that he had been given a post-hypnotic command which was hidden in his subconscious. It looked very much as if he had been intended to escape!

Presently, Wentworth reached the spot where an iron-runged ladder led upward. A trapdoor opened into a woodshed behind a tenement. Seconds later, he was upon an East Side street of New York. From the shadows, Wentworth sent out a faint and eerie whistle.

It was promptly answered!

From the cross-street, two stalwart warriors came striding, side by side, the hound straining the leash between them. They met him without words, and Jackson handed over two automatics which Wentworth hefted a moment before he thrust them into his waist-band. So far, everything was proceeding in accordance with the plans of Dr. Fuji.

Now, at last, the *Spider* would take command.

HE LOOKED up with a quick, thin smile. "I have located the headquarters of Dr. Fuji," he said quietly, "or it has been found for me. We will need the dog to find *him*, but the door is open." He drew in a small breath, and laughed. "Let's take it apart!"

He led the way back to the trapdoor; back to the corridor where the traps were locked; back toward the gabble of Japanese voices!

The dog continued to strain at the leash after they had passed the door of his curious cell, and Wentworth smiled with this unneeded proof that he had traveled the corridor before! Apparently, he had succeeded in the last moment of consciousness in loosening the stopper of the bottle. Jackson and Ram Singh had found him without difficulty.

"We slept in relays, major," Jackson whispered. "If we heard no word within

twenty-four hours, we would have acted!"

Twenty-four hours! For the first time, then, Wentworth realized how long he had been a prisoner of Fuji, and his eyes tightened with the full knowledge of the danger. He reached out in the darkness and caught the arm of Ram Singh. They were too close now to the sound of Japanese voices to risk speaking. He squeezed Ram Singh's arm twice—there were two of the Japanese, as he could hear—and then thrust the big Sikh forward.

His passage was as silent as a wraith's, and except for the fact that Wentworth could see the huge loom of his shoulders against the dim light where the two Japanese sat, he could not have believed Ram Singh had gone to the attack.

Short of the door, the Sikh paused and then, suddenly, he leaped from sight! There was a single faint squawk of alarm, instantly silenced. Seconds later, Ram Singh was in the doorway and gesturing. Wentworth could feel the shoulder-thrusting swagger of Jackson beside him, irritated that the other should have the first call to service.

They stepped into the small guard room, and the two Japanese were dead. Their throats were cut.

"Messy patrol work," Jackson grumbled.

Ram Singh showed his teeth in a flash-in grin. "Thou hast the heart of a chicken," he rumbled.

Wentworth hid a smile and silenced them with a gesture of his hand. "Let the dog lead," he said. "It will take us to Dr. Fuji!"

There were three exits to the guard room besides the one by which they had come, and the dog snuffed eagerly of the floor, then strained toward the midmost one. It was narrow and unprepossessing beside the smooth concrete walls of the others and Wentworth nodded his grim approval of Fuji's perpetual caution. Twice, the corridor branched, and but for

"MIGHT IS RIGHT!"



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the dog they would have had a vain search, for when finally the tunnel ended it was against a wall of earth exactly like the flanking bulkheads! But the dog snuffed at its base, then twisted its head about to look into Wentworth's face with intelligent eyes, as much as to say:

"Well how can I follow the trail if you let walls get in the way?"

Wentworth said softly, "Get back from the wall."

Then he let the light of his flash roam with slow precision over the face. It was earth, beyond any doubt, yet the dog snuffed at its base! Wentworth searched ceiling and floor, and smiled briefly.

"The earth of the floor against the wall is a thin coating fastened to something like steel or concrete," he said. "We must find its operation. I do not wish to alarm . . . anyone!"

WENTWORTH knelt to use his light to better advantage, probing the edges of the door with illumination, and then, abruptly, he stiffened! From beyond the blockading wall, there came the faint and mellow notes of chimes!

"Back; get back," he warned sharply. "It was light operated!"

He thrust away from the door himself and, an instant later, a thin wash of greenish gas squeezed out from about the edges of the trap! The door had not moved. Apparently some farther use of light was necessary to open it. His failure to use the extra device had released the gas. And Wentworth thought that he identified that gas as the same that almost had destroyed Kirkpatrick!

Even as he warned, the hound jerked free of its leash and frisked toward Wentworth . . . went past him into the gas. There was an instant sickening whine of pain from the dog, then a yelp of terror! It bolted past the three men and yammered into the darkness of the tunnel, but where its feet had struck, there was blood.

"The gas is a flesh-eater," Wentworth said, shortly. "Ram Singh, lift me to the ceiling, and then get back! Keep away from that gas, for your life!"

Ram Singh did not understand, but he lifted Wentworth, according to his directions, until by bracing across the tunnel from wall to wall, he could support himself, face-down, close to the ceiling. Using the technique he had perfected in many a chimney climb in the Swiss Alps, Wentworth inched along the tunnel until he was directly over the trap door.

He directed the beam of his light toward the spot in the door's edge where it had struck just before the chimes sounded. Once more they rang faintly through the thickness of the walls. Then Wentworth flickered his torch. Once, and a gong sounded; twice, and it sounded again, and again, and again . . . but the door remained fast.

Wentworth understood then that some farther action was necessary. The gong was undoubtedly a signal, but it would not open the trapdoor! Wentworth thrust away his light, and drew his gun. His back and thighs were aching with the strain of maintaining himself in his precarious position. A quick glance showed that Ram Singh and Jackson had retreated fully twenty feet along the corridor. The gas had crawled that far! And Wentworth knew that even his great strength and nerve were unequal to the task of inching back along the ceiling for that impossible distance.

Grimly, he threw a bullet into the light-sensitive spot beside the trap. The crash of the concussion almost knocked him from his position. The steel of the trapdoor rang. That was all. Once more Wentworth smashed lead into the edge of the trap . . . and then suddenly it flipped upward, shivered erect. At the same instant, searing flame raced along the floor of the tunnel! It gushed upward from the pit beneath the door.

Wentworth flung his arms over his face. He felt his hold slipping as his senses reeled from the insufferable heat. He fell . . . and caught himself on the edge of the trap. He sprang downward instantly, and with dazzled eyes saw two men racing toward him. In their hands, they held the long, razor-keen, two-handed swords of the samurai!

WENTWORTH'S gun kicked against his wrist almost without conscious intent; kicked twice . . . and the two men were down and gasping out their lives on the floor.

An instant later, Jackson's face was white above him in the opening of the trapdoor. "Hurt, major?" he asked hoarsely.

Wentworth said, dully, "No. The flame burned up the gas, it seems. Our way is open."

Ram Singh and Jackson dropped to the floor beside him, and the Sikh laughed softly. "*Wah*, those big swords! Will they never learn they are too slow for the knife!"

Jackson spat. "Right nice little pig-stickers."

They followed Wentworth as he raced toward the oblong of brilliant light that opened before them. They burst through behind him . . . and they were in a conservatory of flowers and twisted small trees. Overhead, the sunlight lamps blazed. Against the far wall, was the silken mat of Dr. Fuji.

The room was empty!

"This must be his room," Wentworth said softly. "He was always mad about flowers and these small twisted dwarf trees . . . as twisted as his mind."

Ram Singh said dubiously. "But he was not here, master. We entered by the only door. He was not here."

Wentworth's lips twisted. "Yet he is not a man, I think, who would care to go about the city much. He is too well known

to the federal authorities. And this room is super-heated. He is very old. No, I think he was here. I think he is near."

He lifted up his gun and squeezed the trigger, and a dwarf tree was torn from its roots and hurled a dozen feet. A fragment of it struck the glass vase beside the mat of Fuji, and the door slid shut behind them. Wentworth glanced toward it with narrowed eyes and nodded. Photo-electric cells and sonic-operated doors. Fuji could use modern devices, too!



He fired again, and another tree was shattered. "This is really pleasant," he said, loudly. "The lighting is excellent, and we can get in some target practice. Ram Singh, there is a tree that looks like a woman in agony. I think I could hit that twice with one bullet."

Ram Singh and Jackson stared at him curiously, and the gun leaped again in his hand . . . and shattered in two places the tree of which he spoke. Wentworth laughed boisterously.

"Help yourselves, boys," he said. "You'll never have another chance like this. Each of those trees is several hundred years old! Think of destroying centuries with one bullet!"

Twice more, he fired . . . and abruptly, a door slid open in the wall across the room! Four small men bounced through, and one had an automatic rifle in his hands. He dropped to one knee, and the others opened up with their automatics. Jackson's harsh laugh matched that of the *Spider* as he leaped to his master's side.

Overhead, Ram Singh's singing knife whined as it flew through the air.

"Through that door, Ram Singh!" Wentworth snapped. "You will find Dr. Fuji! Do not look at him . . . but cut his throat!"

Their guns blasted, and the four fighting men of Japan went down like duck-pins under the assault of a bomb. Ram Singh charged across the room with great bounds, vaulted through the open door . . . and it slapped shut behind him!

"After him!" Wentworth cried. "The trick of shooting up his precious trees will not bring him out again!"

They slammed against the door, and it was hard steel and hurled them back. Wentworth's bullets rang on it in vain. The door would not yield, and behind it they heard the voice of the powerful, the fearless Ram Singh lifted in a scream of pure terror!

CHAPTER TEN

Back to Back

INSTANTLY, Richard Wentworth recognized the futility of attempting to force the steel door, despite the wild urgency of Ram Singh's screams. While Jackson still hurled himself and his bullets against the barrier, in a frenzy to reach his comrade at arms, Wentworth turned away.

In a single leap, he reached the slim crystal vase beside the silken prayer mat of Dr. Fuji, and shouted at Jackson for silence. He tapped the glass, and the silvery note rang through the room. The door by which they had first entered slid open, and more Japanese charged in!

Wentworth still crouched beside the base and this time, as he sounded it, he just touched it with a fingernail. The note rang pure and clear, but high above it, sounded the thin harmonic. And the door through which Ram Singh had leaped slid open!

Through it, Jackson hurled himself with a savage rush. Snatching up the vase, Wentworth leaped after him. Against the far wall, Ram Singh writhed and leaped, arms straight down at his sides. His eyes were fixed in horror on the floor, and he pranced now this way, now that, as if he dodged a striking snake; as if he dodged a hundred striking snakes.

There was nothing on the floor!

Across the room from him stood Lona Deeping and, as the door opened, she held a rifle poised in her hands . . . a rifle with a slim, slashing bayonet on its barrel! She walked toward Ram Singh with the rifle poised for the thrust that would kill him!

With a shout, Jackson sprung toward her! He struck at the bayonet with his automatic, but Lona Deeping only whipped the blade aside and then braced her shoulders for the fatal thrust! Jackson seized the naked blade with his bare hand and thrust it aside just in time! Its tip stabbed deep into the earthen wall beside Ram Singh!

With a wrench, Jackson had the bayonet and rifle. He thrust Lona Deeping violently backward so that she struck the wall and stood there, dazed. He whirled on Ram Singh and his voice lifted in a parade ground bellow that drowned out even the yelps of the charging Japanese!

Wentworth was striving desperately to close the steel door. He had set the vase upon the floor and sounded the same note again. He had tried the pure note. Abruptly, he snatched up the vase and, gripping it with his fingertips, tried again. The muted note slid the steel door gently shut, just as the Japanese reached it. One man thunderbolted through the entrance, and he looked, for a brief second, into the black eye of the *Spider's* gun.

It spat at him . . . and he died.

The hammering of the Japanese upon the steel-clad door was muted, and Jackson's angry voice filled the room.

"Dancing around like a damned temple



The assailants were mowed down like duck-pins!

girl, screaming at the top of your lungs . . . and there ain't nothing there! Do you hear me, there ain't nothing *there!*"

He stood before Ram Singh with the rifle clenched in one hand, a gun in the other. He shook them alternately, completely unaware of what he held. Across the room, Lona watched with wide, dazed eyes. Ram Singh's face was twisted now with rage, but still he could not move his arms from his sides.

Wentworth stepped quietly to Jackson's side. "Steady, sergeant," he said. "Ram Singh has been hypnotized!"

Jackson scarcely heeded. "Letting a damned pigmy of a Jap hypnotize you into the screaming meemies. . ."

Wentworth's hand fell on Jackson's shoulder. "I sent Ram Singh because I myself was afraid to face Fuji," he said.

Jackson's head swung about as if it had been whipped by a cord. He said, "You—*afraid!*"

Wentworth nodded. "I was afraid Fuji would escape by hypnotizing me, since he already had hypnotized me once before. Watch the woman. If we don't bother her, I think that she will presently open a way for us."

HE STEPPED close to Ram Singh and gripped the man's ears with both hands, held his head motionless so that his eyes were focused on Wentworth's. Slowly, Ram Singh's movements slowed, stopped; his cries settled to panting sighs. His eyes widened under the shock of the will of the Master of Men.

"Ram Singh," Wentworth said softly, and repeated the name until the Sikh faltered, "Master?"

"It is I," Wentworth said, softly. "You are free. I have liberated you."

Ram Singh lifted his arms in a wide gesture of freedom. "There is nothing to fear. You are free. Completely free. It is I, your master, who speaks."

Ram Singh jerked. His head sagged for a moment, then lifted and he looked wonderingly about the room.

"Where is that withered mummy of a man?" he snarled. "I threw my knife at him, and he swallowed it, and then he turned loose legions of snakes upon me. The floor was alive with kraits and cobras. They bit me a thousand times, but it was as nothing to the blood of the fighting Singhs!"

"Steady, Ram Singh," Wentworth said softly. "You were hypnotized, but think no shame for it. Never since I left Tibet have I faced such a will. Stand here, now."

Jackson was still scowling. He spat contemptuously on the floor, and Ram Singh's eyes narrowed. "Listen, thou pale worm . . ." he began.

"Hypnotized!" Jackson growled, "and you let the biggest prize of the package get away. Swallowed your knife!"

"We will see if thou canst swallow its twin!" Ram Singh took a long step forward, and Wentworth's swinging hand checked him.

"You two war dogs quit sniffing at each other," he said quietly. "Watch the woman. She was hypnotized into an attempt at killing you, Ram Singh. Wait."

Wentworth walked toward her. "You murderess!" he said, harshly. "You have killed Ram Singh and Wentworth! You are a fiend! You will stay in this room until I come back."

He stepped away from her and a look of cunning crossed the wooden face of Lona Deeping. She reached behind a thin drape and touched some hidden spring, for a black tunnel's mouth opened in the wall. Then she stepped to the wall where she had stabbed at Ram Singh and her hands hovered over some damp spots on the earth. A door opened, but before she could step inside it, Wentworth sprang upon her.

The door revealed merely a narrow

cell. This was her hiding place. The other door—the other door must be the way that Dr. Fuji had fled! Wentworth whirled Lona Deeping toward it, and terror mounted to her lips in a scream.

"No!" she cried. "No, that way is death!"

Wentworth checked at the entrance and he looked down to see that a narrow rill of water flowed across the floor from side to side, and that water flowed also down the walls. He shook his head in bewilderment, and flung the beam of his flashlight along the corridor. It caught the glitter of a myriad iridescent spots of light. He saw a snake retreat sluggishly from the brilliance, but the spots were everywhere . . . on ceiling and walls and floor!

The tunnel was literally lined with every conceivable kind of viper and deadly insect!

There was no escape by the way that Fuji had followed. He must have released these killers after his own passage. And at the steel door behind them, the Japanese stormed and shouted!

Even as the thought flashed across Wentworth's mind, he heard Ram Singh cry out in a return of his hypnotic terror as he realized what menaced them in the corridor. The Sikh leaped forward to catch Wentworth by the shoulder. As he leaped, his foot caught the crystal vase, and its note rang out, muted and flat, in the room of death.

It rang . . . and shattered. And the the door slid open, and the hordes of killers poured in!

Above their clamor rang the voice of the *Spider*:

"Ram Singh! Jackson! Destroy them! I follow Fuji!"

The guns of his staunch allies crashed out, and Wentworth seized Lona by the arm and stepped to the mouth of the death-infested tunnel. She shrank back, screaming, fighting.

"Don't be foolish, my dear," Wentworth said into her ear above the clamor of battle, "I am the *Spider*, and these creatures cannot harm me or those I protect."

Lona's head swung toward him in dazed wonder.

Wentworth nodded at her. "You will take me to the Most High, to the samurai, Dr. Fuji. Lead on."

Lona stepped toward the tunnel, but Wentworth had a tight grip on her arm. He stripped the mask from his flashlight and let its powerful beam sweep the corridor. Everywhere, there were dancing small lights that were the eyes of the spiders and scorpions on the walls. Snakes slithered from the brilliance.

Wentworth and Lona Deeping stepped into the corridor of awful destruction.



RAM SINGH fired his last bullet and hurled his automatic into a man's face. The man went back and down . . . and Ram Singh had only his knife. But the Japanese had not dared to use any firearms. There were too many of them and they feared to strike their fellows. It was the one advantage the two gallant defenders of the *Spider* had.

At almost the same instant, Jackson emptied his gun, thrust it into his belt against the possibility of later use, and whipped the bayoneted rifle into his hands. He laughed as he felt the weight and



balance of the weapon. This was a tool to his liking!

From the fierce mien of the two warriors, the Japanese fell back for an instant. There were seven of them. Four of their number lay upon the floor, dead or permanently out of the fight, but there were still seven. In their hands they gripped the long razor-keen two-handed swords of the samurai, almost as long as they were tall, and here there was ample height to swing them. The men were small, but the power in their shoulders was clearly evident in the light way they held their swords.

Their leader stepped forward. "We will allow you to surrender," he said. "You are feebly armed; death is behind and before you. There is no need to die under our swords."

Jackson grinned and balanced the rifle in his two hands. Ram Singh looked at him, and slowly the two men grinned.

"By the seventeen heads of Kali," Ram Singh grumbled, "I believe we should surrender." And he spat.

Jackson nodded gravely, "Yes, indeed, we should surrender."

"There is death all around us," Ram Singh proceeded. "I even hold death in my hand!" He lifted the long curved blade of his knife, and weighed it. He flipped it into the air, and it fell into his palm with a solid thud.

"Then you surrender?" the Japanese asked politely.

Jackson laughed again. "Well, now, I'll tell you," he said. "If there were three times as many of you, and each one of you was more of a man . . . we could still lick the hell out of you!"

Ram Singh shouted. "Only three times as many, thou weakling?"

"That would do for a starter, goat-beard!"

At last, the Japanese understood that they were being mocked, and his face turned to graven wooden. He swung up

the sword and shouted . . . and the entire line of seven Japanese slashed in with their long swords!

Ram Singh dodged under a cutting edge, and leaped in at another of the men. His knife flicked out like the tongue of a snake, and one Japanese staggered backward, stabbed through the heart. Jackson's bayonet clashed on whining steel. He whipped up the butt and another fell back with a shattered jaw.

He whirled in the blade then, and fended off a chopping blow at Ram Singh's head while the Sikh dropped to one knee and drove it at the belly of the swordsman. And Ram Singh sprang from his knees, and drove his turbaned head into the pit of another man's belly as that man braced for a death-stroke at Jackson's temporarily undefended shoulders.

The line of the swordsmen fell back, and one of them examined the blunted edge of his sword, and another let his hang and sagged against the wall while he panted for the breath that had been driven from him. The swordsman with the shattered jaw gravely tied a cloth upward about his head, and gripped his blade again. And there were two dead men on the floor.

"Thou art feeble, Jackson," Ram Singh gibed. "Could thou only break a jaw? Two already have fallen beneath my mighty knife!"

Jackson spat elaborately. "Well, now, I'll tell you, Ram Singh," he said. "If you'd keep that damned turbaned head out of men's bellies, I might be able to slip in a bayonet where it would do some good."

"Old woman!"

"Blundering goat-beard!"

THE two men threw back their heads and laughed and the leader of the Japanese lifted his sword and determination was alight in his eyes. These two fools were obviously mad, but

even madmen must die if the Most High ordered it.

He sprang forward, and his blade was a whirling arc of light, and four other men leaped to the attack beside him. There was no let-up now. Ram Singh demonstrated once more that a straight line is the shortest distance between two points, by punching in with his knife while the sword whirled in an arc. Jackson gave another two inches of steel beneath the breast bone, and the man dropped his sword and seized the rifle with both hands and drew the bayonet home into his body!

For that moment, Jackson was bereft of a weapon. He went down under one knee and felt the burn of steel across his shoulder. Ram Singh was astride him like a Colossus of Rhodes; his great voice lifted in the bellowing war song of the Sikhs. But he was not killing; his knife clashed and clashed again as he ward-

off the blows that rained upon them. Jackson heard him swear with a grunt of pain, and then leap forward. And Jackson squeezed the trigger of his rifle and drew his bayonet free.

He staggered to his feet, swept aside a sword with a hard sideblow of his fist . . . and Ram Singh was down. His turban turned the edge of a sword, but its flat drove his head down into his shoulders. The leader of the Japanese was poised for a slash that would behead the valiant Sikh.

And Jackson slammed into battle!

He went in with the long lifting "rebel yell" with which he had led his platoon in France; and he went in with the bayonet red before him. He thrust into the side of the Japanese leader's neck, and ripped. His body struck the man an instant later and hurled him into the pathway of another down-sweeping sword. Then it was Jackson's turn to stand over



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a fallen comrade and use bayonet and butt together. Three Japanese stood before him and hacked down with their swords, and he swung up the rifle like a bar of steel and the blades hacked and tore at wood and steel.

Then Ram Singh staggered to his feet and they retreated and set their backs against the wall. They were both bleeding now, and Jackson had a weakness in his right shoulder from the cut of the sword; and Ram Singh's left thigh was washed red. The leader of the Japanese was dead. The three who were left on their feet drew back for a moment. One of them was the man with the shattered jaw. It gave his face a curious warped expression. There was harsh malevolence in his glare.

Suddenly, his hand flipped up from his belt and there was a fine white dust flying through the air toward Jackson and Ram Singh. Jackson had just time to cry a warning, and then the stinging stuff hit them. Instantly, the two men were racked by a violent nausea. It bit into the pits of their stomachs like knives. It jerked at their muscles, and weakened them.

"Back to back, thou goat-beard," Jackson whispered.

"Back to back, thou feeble old woman!" Ram Singh croaked.

They braced their bleeding, fainting bodies together, and their weapons were before them, and there were smiles on their faces, and shouts of defiance for their enemies. But the faces of the three Japanese were confident now. They came in with their swords wary and poised . . . and Jackson's arms were weak, and Ram Singh's left leg sagged under him.

Ram Singh spat at them, "Come, thou monkey warts, and learn thy final lesson."

Jackson laughed, "It would be nice if there were men to fight, and not children. . . ."

The Japanese raised his sword. "*Banzai!*" he said, respectfully. "*Charge!*"

CHAPTER ELEVEN

While Death Waits

WENTWORTH'S eyes were alert as he led Lona Deeping through the tunnel infested with death. His life depended on just one thing—the brilliance of his handtorch. These insects and reptiles were all nocturnal, and fled the light. If he could seek out every crevice with his beam, they would retreat before it . . . would stay there so long as the light was on them.

That was what Wentworth hoped.

They went as swiftly as possible through the corridor and twice Wentworth blasted snakes that turned at bay and, four times, he brushed off deadly insects before they could sting. And then they were at an iron ladder that led upward. At the top, a trapdoor stood open. He thrust Lona upward, climbed with his arms about her, and together they broke through into the clear, clean night air.

Wentworth peered about and savage disappointment closed in upon him. It was merely another back yard of a tenement. If Fuji had fled this way, and there was no other retreat open to him, then he had once made good his escape. Wentworth wasted no time. He whirled Lona Deeping about, and flung the savage light of his torch into her eyes, rimmed his own face with its backwash and stared deeply into her eyes.

If Lona Deeping knew where Fuji was, he would soon find it out!

Lona Deeping's eyes flared wide as she felt the impact of his will; she struggled faintly, but already she had been subjected to the power of Dr. Fuji, and there was not much resistance in her.

"Where is the Most High?" Wentworth asked, quietly.

"I do not know," Lona said thickly. "I am forbidden to know."

Wentworth swore softly, but he knew

there was no use in attempting to penetrate the veil, for even under hypnotism the prohibition which Fuji had hypnotically set up would still dominate.

"What have you done?" Wentworth asked softly.

Lona Deeping smiled slowly. "I have killed the enemies of my master," she whispered, "but some still remain!"

"You killed whom?"

"Today," Lona's voice lifted vauntingly, "I destroyed a Sikh, and I have administered the gracious death to Gregory Maincairn!"

Wentworth started at that last name. Maincairn was a prominent attorney, especially familiar with maritime law. His latest prominent case was the defense of some sailor accused of sabotaging seized merchant vessels. Wentworth brushed the thought from his mind.

"Stay here," he ordered Lona. "Stay in this spot until I return."

He plunged back toward the trapdoor and the tunnel that led to the room where Ram Singh and Jackson battled. There was no more he could learn from Lona Deeping, for the moment the trail of Dr. Fuji was lost. It was only in the hope that he might catch the arch-leader of this conspiracy that he had left his men to fight against such hopeless odds. Now the urgency was no longer upon him, he raced back along the tunnel of death!

The light frightened some of the creatures back into hiding. For the rest, Wentworth depended on his speed. He could not stop now to make sure that none of the ghastly killers touched him. He could stop for nothing, for the lives of his men were in danger!

Wentworth burst into the death chamber, and Ram Singh was prone upon the floor, his knife limp in his hand. Over him, Jackson stood at guard with the bayoneted rifle. The blade was broken to a stub, and Jackson's arms seemed scarcely able to lift the battered weapon.

Yet lift it he did, in bare time to fend each slashing blow. But one engaged him from before now, taunting him, holding his attention with feints . . . tiring him out. From behind, two other men crept to the slaughter! Even as Wentworth entered, their swords were swept up for the strokes which would split Jackson apart!

There was no time for gunfire . . . and besides the noise might disconcert Jackson, and enable the man before him to strike his death blow! Wentworth bounded into the room and as he leaped, he snatched one of the long samurai swords from the floor! Not as the Japanese wielded them did the *Spider* use the long weapon. He held it in one hand like a sabre, like a rapier. As the swords struck down at Jackson's unprotected back, Wentworth swung his own sword up to meet them!

The clash of steel rang like valiant music. The upswing of the sword dashed the two blades away from Jackson, hurled the two men backward.

"I am with you, sergeant," Wentworth said quietly.

Jackson laughed. "Back to back," he whispered drunkenly.

HE PICKED his rifle up high again and went in toward the Japanese who challenged him. There was the whir and clash of steel, and Jackson's brave laughter. Wentworth leaped upon the two Japanese. They were startled into retreat. They were intimidated by a man who handled, lightly as a foil, their two-handed swords gripped in one hand.

He swept upon them and the blade whirled about his head and clattered and clashed upon their two fending swords. Swift as light, then, he changed his tactics. The sword lanced out like a rapier, and one man pressed both palms to his chest. His comrade sprang forward with the two-handed chop and Wentworth did not

parry. Instead, he leaped in under the stroke, drawing his sword behind him as he went past. It was totally unorthodox . . . and it was the type of attack the Japanese would be least able to understand. As he went past, Wentworth whipped over the sword and its edge sliced across the man's throat.

There was no need to look at him again. Wentworth whirled to help Jackson if need be, and saw the sergeant drop to one knee under a side-slashing stroke, and drive the broken blade of his bayonet home with all the lunging power of his broad shoulders. He heaved to his feet then, pivoted at attention. Crisply, he saluted.

"Beg to report, sir," he said, "that the enemy is in full retreat."

He laughed then, and pitched forward on his face.

It was a half hour before Wentworth could get the wounds of his gallant soldiers bound, and revive them to the point where they could follow him through the corridor of death to the dingy yard behind a tenement. The yard was empty.

Lona Deeping had disappeared!

At the discovery, Wentworth knew suddenly the fearful urgency of the news that Lona Deeping had given him. Only the fact that she held immediately important information would have caused Dr. Fuji to send back for her, after he had abandoned her to death to cover his own escape. Only a command from Dr. Fuji himself could have snapped the hypnotic command which Wentworth had laid upon her with his powerful will.

The *Spider's* brain raced with swift conjecture as he led his men back to where they had parked the Daimler. He sprang behind the wheel and sent it hurtling through the night until he found a place where he could telephone. He left the engine running.

Rapidly, he put through a phone call to police headquarters and, when he had

been connected with Kirkpatrick, he whispered into the transmitter . . . and no man could have told whether man or woman spoke.

"Save the lawyer, Maincainr," he whispered. "Save the lawyer, Maincainr, from the *gracious death*. . . Nine tears . . . nine tears. . ."

He hung up the receiver and raced back to the limousine, whipped it once more on its swift race through the night. Ram Singh was more fully recovered from the effects of the battle, and to him Wentworth entrusted the wheel while he opened the secret compartment which contained his make-up materials, and clothing.

"To the City Jail," he ordered quietly. "Jackson, listen please. This is vitally important information which should be relayed to Miss Nita at the first opportunity."

He needed to say no more than that. Jackson knew that when the *Spider* wanted information relayed to Nita van Sloan it was only because the *Spider* was going into deep peril. If he were killed in the fight, he wanted the facts to be in the hands of the authorities, so that they, and his comrades, could carry on the *Spider's* battle.

Jackson's head whipped about and his broad jaw set in sudden pain. His wound was bleeding again. "Yes, major," he said quietly.

"Maincainr has been sentenced to the *gracious death*," he said. "I warned Kirkpatrick and made it seem that the message came from The Face, from whom I had the information. Maincainr's latest pending case is the defense of some Japanese seaman accused of sabotage. This is not a thing that Dr. Fuji would want to stop. Therefore, his death sentence from Fuji can mean only one thing:

"Maincainr has learned too much!"

Jackson nodded, crisply. "Understood, major!"

Wentworth nodded. "So I am going

to the jail to interview the seaman. I hope to arrive before he, too, is destroyed. It may already be too late for Maincairn."

AS HE spoke, he was rapidly reshaping his face, roughing his eyebrows, working in saturnine lines about his mouth, fitting a spiked mustache to his upper lip. He looked around to utter a farther warning to Jackson, and the sergeant who had served him so long, started in abrupt amazement.

Jackson laughed, "I never can get used to the way you can change, major. You're the spitting image of Commissioner Kirkpatrick."

Wentworth spoke, and it was in Kirkpatrick's dry voice, "Such was my intention, Jackson!"

A while later, the limousine paused briefly before the portals of the jail, and it was with Kirkpatrick's stiffly military stride that Wentworth climbed the steps; with Kirkpatrick's exact gesture that he acknowledged the salute of the door guard. A brief glance at the roster of prisoners told him what he wanted to know.

"Bring the prisoner, Maku, to the warden's office," he ordered.

Wentworth had the office to himself and he made swiftly sure of the security of the windows, and drew the shades. He was seated behind the warden's desk when the sailor, Maku, was brought to him. Curtly, Wentworth dismissed the guards and put his gray-blue gaze upon the prisoner.

"Come to the desk," he ordered shortly.



Already, the force of his will was at work on the man, conquering his resistance. Wentworth stretched out his blunt, powerful hands upon the desk, and the black seal of the *Spider* ring caught the man's eyes. Wentworth inserted his thumbnail in the appropriate place and pressed . . . and against the blackness of the seal, there glowed the fiery lineaments of a spider!

Maku dropped to his knees, "No!" he whispered. "No! Spare me from the *gracious death*! In the name of the most High, who are you?"

Wentworth had intended to frighten the man with the *Spider seal* . . . and he had succeeded to an unexpected degree! But his success did not discountenance him in the least.

"My identity does not matter," he said, harshly. "You know why I have come!"

Maku kneeled stiffly as a man awaiting the headsman's sword, and his eyes were glazed . . . and suddenly Wentworth knew the source of his terror. In her dying moments, Nita van Sloan's maid had babbled of the . . . *red spider*! In the tunnel of death, there had been many loathesome insects. That was the answer. *The Gracious Death was caused by the bite of a red spider!*

Wentworth's hand shot toward the telephone, but he dared not break the hold he held over this sailor to warn Kirkpatrick now what he must expect. He must only race after Kirkpatrick at the first possible moment, for the Gracious Death could strike again and again! Kirkpatrick must beware of the spider's bite!

"You know why I have come!" he repeated to the sailor.

The man stammered, "But, master, I told the lawyer almost nothing. Only about the one-man torpedoes. It was wrong, master, but . . ."

The window shade flew up with a wild and racketing clatter. The scream of Maku and the shattering of the glass pane

came together and then something burst at the side of the kneeling sailor! It was a soft burst, and upward from the spot spurted writhing coils of the green gas the *Spider* had seen before!

Wentworth's bound took him around the desk, and he snatched at the sailor's collar to drag him aside. He was too late. The man was writhing in agony on the floor, and already his screams were incoherent. The gas had eaten already into his mouth!

The knowledge hit Wentworth and he bounded back from the wretched, doomed sailor. He felt a faint burning on his own cheeks!

The gas was attacking him!

There was only one thing to do, and Wentworth acted with the invariable speed which had made the *Spider* able to conquer so many forces of evil; which made him at once the fear and admiration of the law breakers throughout the whole world.

He stripped off his disguise! The materials he had spread over his face to alter its appearance and coloring had absorbed a portion of the gas, and its removal was his only hope. He ripped off then the material that changed Richard Wentworth into Stanley Kirkpatrick. It was damnably dangerous. It was his only chance.

He ripped open the door of the warden's office, even as men struck it from outside. They started past him, and Wentworth seized them and violently hurled them back.

"You fools!" he snapped. "Keep away! There is gas in that room that will strip the flesh from your bones!"

The deputy warden hurried up late, just in time to hear him speak.

"Hey!" he gasped. "Hey! He's dressed like Kirkpatrick, and he talks like Kirkpatrick. But he ain't! Look at his face! It's Richard Wentworth! Get him there, fast! Can't you see, you dumb fools! *He must have killed the prisoner!*"

CHAPTER TWELVE

It's the SPIDER!

WENTWORTH knew that, with time and examination, he could prove that he had not killed the prisoner, Maku. But he knew also that there was no time for any delay. It was desperately important that he reach Kirkpatrick at once, lest Kirkpatrick be killed by the red spider which delivered the sting of the Gracious Death.

Consequently, he struck at the deputy warden before the accusing words were fairly out of his mouth! He strode toward the man, so that only the deputy could see his face. His clothing remained the clothing of Kirkpatrick, and he spoke with the same crisp cool accents.

"Don't be a fool, warden," he said sharply. "Are you blind to call me out of my name! Get your men into the streets! A gas bomb was tossed through the window. Get your men into the streets . . ." His gun was in his hand and, out of sight, it ground into the deputy's side. He whirled and lifted his arm to point . . . and his arm concealed his face.

"Get out there, fast! Look for Japanese! One of them tossed a gas bomb through the window. Fast, men. Fast!"

His voice rang with the clear accent of command, and through it spoke the will of the Master of Men!

Only for an instant did the prison guards hesitate, then they streaked for the street door toward which Wentworth pointed.

"Hurry!" he hurled after them . . . and followed, the automatic still prodding into the deputy's ribs, urging him along. "Warden," he said, "I'm sorry for this. Kirkpatrick is in deadly danger. I learned that. I am going to help him. Therefore, I cannot delay to answer your questions. You will understand, I know!"

They had reached the street door, and

in three bounds, Wentworth reached the shadowy cross-way and was sprinting at top speed. The Daimler was gone, but in its place according to his orders, one of the powerful but shabby coupés of the *Spider* had been placed.

He leaped in behind the wheel, kicked the motor to instant life, and whirled it in a tight-turn that sent it hurtling toward the next avenue with screaming tires. It was only instants before he flashed out of sight . . . then he was racing frantically across the city toward the office building where he knew the lawyer, Maincain, had offices; to which the phone call of The Face had sent Kirkpatrick—and where the Gracious Death lurked for the unwary!

As he sped the car along, he reached to secret compartments for a cape and black hat, for the make-up tray with which he could convert himself into the *Spider*, materials which could be removed only by use of a special solvent Wentworth himself had invented.

His mind combed swiftly over the few words that the sailor had uttered before he was killed. One-man torpedoes. . . . The meaning of that was clear. The Japanese had small submersibles, which could be operated over short distances as submarines . . . but which actually were a huge store of explosives, in fact, a torpedo which could carry an operator inside to direct it to the destruction of a ship in a single suicidal dash of glory!

There had been rumors of such an invention before this. Wentworth could not understand why the revelation by the sailor should have caused him to merit death at the hands of Dr. Fuji. There must have been more to the revelation than that. Wentworth shook his head. It fell strangely heavy and fuddled. His thoughts were clouded. He would convey the information, of course, to the proper naval authorities. There were quite a few high officials in New York itself since a



large portion of the fleet was anchored in the harbor. He would have no trouble in getting the information through to the right man.

He had a lot of difficulty in following that thought to its logical conclusion. He could think only of Kirkpatrick, and he felt a little angry at the Commissioner, for no reason that he could discover. There was something in the back of his mind, something about Kirkpatrick, that nagged at him. Kirkpatrick had been his enemy, the enemy of the *Spider* through many years of battling against the Underworld. But that fact had never stirred Wentworth to bitterness. Never before.

But tonight, he knew bitterness.

And there was that nagging thought in the back of his mind that simply would not be brought forward for observation.

Wentworth did not remember now his earlier conviction that he had been hypnotized by Dr. Fuji. There was a reason why he could not remember. The will of Dr. Fuji, triumphing over Wentworth's drug-weakened senses, had commanded that he should forget!

It had given him another order . . . and commanded him to forget until the instant when it would be fulfilled. That order already was working in the back of Wentworth's mind. Presently, it would burst into power and take full possession of him, and he would become, for that moment, the slave of Dr. Fuji!

That order was . . . *Kill Kirkpatrick on sight!*

THE SHOCK of the whisper over the telephone struck through Stanley Kirkpatrick like a sword of exquisite pleasure. For that moment when he heard the whisper, "Nine tears . . . nine tears . . ." it was Lona Deeping who spoke to him.

An instant, the shock of discovery muted his voice. When he cried out, the wire was dead. He slapped his hand to the annunciator box, set the buzzer whining . . . and stared into space. Three times, the operator queried him in rising anxiety before he answered:

"Never mind."

He could not send his men seeking Lona Deeping!

Last night, anger and pain had riven him, but he had conquered that. No matter what thing Lona Deeping had done, he was sure of her enduring love. She could not fail to love him, when his love for her was so great and sure and strong!

Tonight, the prayer that his soul had uttered had been answered. The voice over the phone had been on the side of law and order, on *his* side. Whatever had happened to Lona, Kirkpatrick felt, had been lifted. Kirkpatrick clasped his hands together, and his head bowed. He was conscious of no words, no thoughts, but his heart was singing a psalm of thanksgiving.

It lasted only a moment, then he sprang from his chair and the efficient Commissioner of Police took charge. No cordon of police was to be thrown about the lawyer's office buildings. Such methods could not combat the subtlety of the Samurai. He merely called his car, tossed an address at the chauffeur and settled into a grim waiting.

He did not know why Maincain was being attacked, but he thought no assault could succeed while he was there!

So he sped to the office of the lawyer, and the man himself answered his call and admitted him. Maincain was frowning.

"Strange that you should come," he said. "I have some information which I have been turning over in my brain. I am not sure that I have the right to reveal it, since it was the confidence of a client. But neither am I sure that I have the right *not* to reveal it!"

Kirkpatrick said, "I cannot resolve your doubts, but I can tell you this. Your life is in danger. And it must be because of what you know! The safest thing for you to do would be to broadcast your information at the earliest possible moment. When many know your secret, your death no longer becomes important!"

Maincain nodded his head with its thatch of silver hair. His face was smooth, unlined, extremely youthful by contrast with his crown of hair. "You speak sense," he said, "but it is something I must resolve with my conscience. Would you mind waiting in the outer office for a few moments? I want to make a phone call, and then . . ."

Kirkpatrick agreed crisply and, when Maincain was within the private office, he stood on alert legs in the middle of the outer office and pivoted slowly. He had unbuttoned his coat and the loosened lapels showed the glinting butt of his long-barreled revolver. He felt keen, excited. A smile stirred his grim mouth corners, and softened the glint of his clear blue eyes. Lona! Lona had called him!

He whispered her name, but his eyes did not lose their keen sharpness of perception. There was no place in this outer office where anyone might hide. He frowned at a thought flashing across his brain. There had been no person concealed in his home when the gas had exploded from the cellarette and almost destroyed him; would have destroyed him, save for the timely action of his "enemy" the *Spider*.

Kirkpatrick wished again, as he had so many times before, that the *Spider* would operate within the law and become his

staunch ally, rather than a criminal whom it was necessary to hunt, even while he recognized that the man was doing an invaluable work for mankind. Regrets were useless. Kirkpatrick knew, even when he disapproved, that the chief value of the *Spider*, aside from his superlative powers, was the fact that he was completely beyond the law. The terror that he spread hinged on that fact. He could reach men whom the law could not touch, because of the technicalities that were necessary for the protection of the innocent.

That was the thought that was uppermost in his mind when he heard an exclamation of anger—or shock, he could not tell which—from the inner office. He sprang instantly to the door, called the lawyer.

"I'm perfectly all right," Maincain said, "only there's something wrong with my telephone. It almost deafened me, and it hurt." His voice was muted.

"Call me if the slightest suspicious thing occurs," Kirkpatrick warned.

Maincain's voice turned irritable. "Don't shout so loud, man. I'm not deaf."

KIRKPATRICK stood frowning at the door. He had not used a loud tone of voice. It was curious that Maincain should think so, but in itself, that fact meant nothing to Kirkpatrick.

It would have meant much to the *Spider*, who had heard Nita's maid scream with agony at the pain the sound of footfalls gave her!

But Kirkpatrick only frowned, and continued to stand guard outside, when the enemy was already within! He stood there, fumbling over the vague and kindly thoughts of the *Spider*; the exhilarating thought of Lona . . . and did nothing while the virus of the Gracious Death ran cold, and then fiery hot, through the veins of Maincain!

It was not until Kirkpatrick bumped against the wall in passing, and Maincain

screamed in sudden hysterical pain, that Kirkpatrick realized something terrible had happened in the inner office. He shouted, and Maincain screamed. He beat on the door, and with each thud of his fist, the screams of Maincain soared and soared. In furious haste, Kirkpatrick fired a shot through the lock of the door, struck it with his shoulder.

When he burst into the inner office, Maincain was writhing in convulsions on the floor while his hands stripped at his clothing, whose touch upon his skin he could not even bear.

"It was the spider," he babbled. "The red spider. The spider . . . spider . . . spider . . . spider . . ."

It was long before those screams died out; not until the ambulance had come and borne away the expiring, idiocy-stricken lawyer . . . and Kirkpatrick stood alone in the room in which Maincain had fallen. Slowly then, heavily then, he once more looked about him, but upon his soul lay heavily the knowledge of defeat.

He stepped to Maincain's desk and looked down at his appointment pad, and there staring up at him was the name of the last person whom Maincain had interviewed:

Lona Deeping!

A strong shiver struck through Kirkpatrick, and his head flung up. Someone had brought into this office the as-yet-undiscovered cause of his death. Someone . . . and Lona Deeping had been his last visitor, Lona Deeping who had phoned him of Maincain's danger.

Kirkpatrick said, "No!"

It was a cry that tore, but did not convince him. Lona Deeping had attempted his life. Lona Deeping had been here . . . and the phoned warning might be only a belated effort to assist the man she had injured. Or it might have been a move to bring him into danger himself!

Kirkpatrick strode to the telephone and snapped up the instrument. "Police head-

quarters," he said in a flat, emotionless voice. "Radio broadcast . . . Kirkpatrick here. . . You will put out a general alarm at once for Lona Deeping, alias The Face, on suspicion of homicide. Her full description will be found in the files, and" he shivered, but drove his voice on doggedly, "in the top central drawer of my desk will be found a portrait photograph of her. It does her beauty less than justice." His voice dropped a full tone. "You will have the photographer obliterate the writing across the picture before he prepares a release to the press."

He could not bring himself to repeat, even in his own mind, the words that Lona's lovely hand had written across her portrait.

"To the man I love . . . Lona."

KIRKPATRICK thrust the phone back upon its hook and stood with braced arms, rigidly bowed neck. He was like that when laughter mocked him from the doorway. He whirled, his hand raking toward his gun . . . and looked into the face, and into the gun-muzzle, of the *Spider*!

"Oh, ye of little faith!" the *Spider* mocked him. "Are you so eager to chastise your love, then, that you suspect her on the slightest pretext? Or didn't you hear what Maincain said before he died? Didn't you hear him say . . . *'the red spider . . . the spider!'*"



Kirkpatrick gasped and, with his left hand, Wentworth flicked a crisp white oblong of a card across the room. It

settled upon Maincain's desk, and upon its impeccable face there glowed . . . *the scarlet seal of the Spider!*

Wentworth did those things with a titanic effort of will. He did them because, before he entered the office, he had determined upon that action. He had set his mind in operation to perform this one and appointed task, but his body carried out his commands only because of the fierce power of his will.

Now, suddenly, his will ceased to operate. A command had been placed upon him!

Across his brain, words seared themselves in terrible scorching flame!

"I will kill Stanley Kirkpatrick on sight. He is my master's enemy!"

The face of the *Spider* snarled into a mask of hatred, and his gun lifted into line with the heart of Stanley Kirkpatrick. The *Spider* no longer ruled his own body; it was the toy, the slave of Dr. Fuji, and Dr. Fuji had laid a command upon it.

"Kill Kirkpatrick . . . and then destroy yourself!"

Wentworth's lips moved woodenly and the words came out slowly: "I will kill Stanley Kirkpatrick on sight. He is my master's enemy."

Kirkpatrick stared at him with widening eyes. He saw that the gun hand of the *Spider* was quivering. Not enough to throw it out of line, but with the hard quiver of tensed muscles that ran all the way to the shoulder and across the back. His very thighs were quivering in the solid brace of his body. There was perspiration beaded out upon the forehead of the Master of Men; as somewhere within the body that he no longer controlled, his spirit and his will fought against the command of the murderous Samurai!

"I will kill Kirkpatrick," the words came out in thick gusts with each breath, one syllable to a breath. "I will kill

Kirk-pa-trick. It is im-por-tant that I kill Kirk-pa-trick to-night. I must dis-or-ganize the po-lice to-night."

So his voice spoke, a hoarse unrecognizable voice that might have come from the throat of Dr. Fuji himself! He spoke . . . but his body jerked and quivered and even through the words he spoke, there crept small, shivering moans of protest.

And Kirkpatrick was motionless under the gun of the *Spider*, and he knew a rending terror, and a heart-shaking certainty that death was close to him, closer than ever in his entire life!

The *Spider* fought the voice of the man who was his enforced master . . . and his gunhand jerked, jerked, vibrated like a flag pole in the wind.

The voice that was the voice of Dr. Fuji rose to a scream. "I will kill Kirkpatrick! He is my master's enemy!"

The *Spider's* gun shook violently, and he began to shoot. The gun of the *Spider*, which had never yet missed its target, began to hurl bullets at the breast of his friend!

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Death's Command

SEVEN times the *Spider's* finger contracted on the trigger of the automatic and, while he shot, his voice screamed out the words of his command.

"I must kill Kirkpatrick tonight! I must disorganize the police tonight! So that if any of our gentlemen survive, they may escape!"

Seven bullets he hurled at Kirkpatrick, and then he pressed the muzzle of the automatic to his temple and once more pulled the trigger.

There were screams in the outer office, the screams of women. They burst into the office in a tearing crescendo and Nita van Sloan rushed at Wentworth and tore the automatic from his grasp. Across the

desk, Kirkpatrick drew his long-barreled revolver and pointed it at the *Spider*.

And the *Spider* staggered back against the doorjamb and propped himself there, while he shook in all his body. He had fulfilled the command of Dr. Fuji to the extent that Fuji could command his body. He had fired the full clip of bullets from his automatic.

But, in the end, the will of the *Spider* had conquered!

Every one of those bullets had missed its mark . . . and at the end, it was an empty gun that he had pressed to his temple in self-destruction!

But now Kirkpatrick was beside him, was over him, and Wentworth lifted a dazed head only when the handcuffs had locked him securely, his own right wrist, to the left wrist of his friend!

"Nothing is going to save you this time, *Spider*," Kirkpatrick said harshly. "You confessed to me the murder of Maincairn, and you fired seven shots in an effort to murder me. You failed, only because your aim was poor. And the bravado of pressing an empty gun to your temple does not deceive me!"

Wentworth looked up at the face of his friend, and there was still little of comprehension in his glance. Things were coming back to him slowly. The memory of his discovery underground that he had been hypnotized; and now, too, the memory of those wild shots he had thrown at Kirkpatrick, and the final empty obedience of pressing an empty gun to his own temple. He knew now the full command of Dr. Fuji, and that he had fulfilled it —to the limit that Dr. Fuji's will had conquered his!

Nita laughed, and the sound was not wholly convincing. "Stanley Kirkpatrick, you are completely mad," she said. "You say the *Spider* fired seven shots at you . . . and missed! The *Spider* fire seven shots and miss? Either this man is not the *Spider*, or there is something radi-

cally wrong with the entire situation."

Kirkpatrick's face was frowning, but there was clear belief in his voice. "Divine Providence saved me for my work," he said. "That was the only thing that intervened."

"Divine Providence," Wentworth echoed dully, and a slow, tired smile crept across his lips. "Perhaps you are right at that."

Kirkpatrick whirled toward Nita van Sloan, and for the first time seemed to be aware of her presence fully; and of Marianne Jackson who stood behind her.

"What are you two doing here?" he demanded. "How did you arrive so opportunely?"

Nita smiled at him wanly, for her thoughts were all with Richard Wentworth. She saw with relief that he did not wear his steel mask, but the disguise fashioned with chemicals that only his private solvent would remove.

She said, "We were following Lona Deeping, Stanley. We, Marianne and I, were trying to find her for you. We know her tastes in clothing and cosmetics and perfumes. It was the perfume that gave us her trail. We found that she had purchased some of her favorite brand today, and then taken a taxi. It took a long time to locate the taxi that took her from the store where she bought the perfume. But finally we did, and the driver said he had brought Lona here. We were coming to check up on that when we heard a voice crying out. It was the *Spider's* voice, I suppose, but it didn't sound much like him."

Nita swung toward the *Spider*, and she put a special force into her words. "That voice was saying, 'I must kill Kirkpatrick tonight. I must disorganize the police tonight. So that, if any of the gentlemen survive, they may escape.'"

"Well," said Kirkpatrick, "the voice could have been only that of the *Spider*. For his words fitted his attempted deed.

Further, I am convinced that he caused the death of Maincairn, who died screaming the *Spider's* name again and again. I am certain that—"

Nita whirled toward Kirkpatrick. "How do you know he referred to the *Spider*?"

Kirkpatrick related Maincairn's utterly insane behavior. "It was just after he had made a telephone call. He seemed to—"

"Wait!" Nita's voice was urgent. She crossed the room, seized up the telephone and examined the ear-piece. "There!" she exclaimed, and she shook the instrument over the desk. A tiny, balled-up spider rolled onto the shiny surface; a tiny scarlet spider—dead!

"I found one like this in my own apartment," Nita said, "not long after my maid died as you described Maincairn's death. Apparently, this type insect dies after inflicting one deadly bite. And no one has been able to analyze the poison, yet. . . . You see, Kirk, Maincairn's dying words did not refer to . . . the *Spider*—"

"Nonetheless," Kirkpatrick interrupted harshly, "the *Spider* is going to jail. There are plenty of other murders on his head!"

Wentworth listened all the while, his heart bursting with pride. Truly, the woman he loved was a fit mate for the *Spider*! As to the actual discussion, he could not enter it. He could only go numbly along with Kirkpatrick as they led him to a special cell.

HE DROPPED on the cot and pil-
lowed his throbbing forehead on
the heels of his hands, and recuperated his strength. He sucked power into him; he inflated his will. It was a full half hour later that he lifted his head. His face was once more invigorated by the powerful spirit within him.

He did not rise, but sat rigidly while he once more brought his powerful brain

to the problem before him. The things that Nita had cried to him in the office of Maincairn he remembered syllable by syllable. And presently, he put that with what he had learned at the jail.

The sailor had been killed because he had talked to Maincairn, and Maincairn had died for the same reason.

The sailor had said, "I only told them about one-man torpedoes."

Wentworth's own words, dictated by Dr. Fuji, had been, "I must kill Kirkpatrick tonight. I must disorganize the police tonight. If any of our gentlemen survive, they must escape."

One-man suicide torpedoes, each one capable of destroying the largest battleship . . . and the fleet was anchored in the harbor!

In other words, in one blow, this night, Japan would win a defensive war against the United States!

Wentworth shivered and leaped to the bars. "Get Kirkpatrick at once!" he snapped. "I have information of vital importance to deliver to him! It concerns the fate of the entire nation!"

The cop on guard lifted a weary head. "Oh, go back to sleep, hop-head," he said.

Wentworth leaned his head forward and his eyes struck upon the man. "Call Kirkpatrick," he repeated quietly.

The guard jerked to his feet, "Okay, okay," he said irritably. He shouted, and another guard came quickly. "The Spider says he's got to talk to Kirkpatrick or the country will go into a tailspin."

The guard shrugged, went away and presently returned. "No chance, Spider," he said, and grinned knowingly. "The Commissioner is entertaining a lady and didn't say where he was going."

Wentworth gripped the tool-hardened steel of his cell, and knew despair that cut like a knife. He knew the secret of the Samurai's invasion of the United States. But Dr. Fuji was before him.

The fleet, this night, would be crippled . . . and the Spider was incommunicado in the strongest cell in the city.

For that moment, panic shook him, and then the Spider closed his eyes and gathered his great soul within him . . .

THE Spider opened his eyes and looked at the guard, who stared uneasily toward him. The Spider's eyes captured the man's gaze, and after-

LAUGH, CORPSE, LAUGH!

That was the killer's grim command, as the Giggling Death swept Manhattan like an ominous plague. People died by the score, victims of this weird, fatal laughter; while Rod Keeney, your favorite rookie detective, had to keep from laughing long enough to crack this strangest and deadliest case of his career. It's Stewart Sterling's finest novel to date.

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ward the guard could not turn away. Weakened as the *Spider* was from long struggle . . . the stronger was his will for his conquest over the oppression of Dr. Fuji.

Wentworth whispered, "The *Spider* has escaped!"

A shiver ran through the guard's body. He shifted his footing uneasily. He leaned toward the cell, peering between the bars.

"The *Spider* has escaped!" Wentworth said again.

The guard swore softly and took an inquiring step forward. He was looking directly into the eyes of the *Spider*, and yet he seemed to see nothing.

Once more, Wentworth said, "The *Spider* has escaped! You will have to open the door and search the cell. You will have to call the keeper and open the door and search the cell. The *Spider* has escaped!"

Through his eyes flamed all the pent-up power of the Master of Men, power he had gained through years of study and meditation and self-discipline. Now, in a single burning burst, the *Spider* released that power through his eyes into the brain of the guard.

Suddenly, the man sprang toward the cell. He gripped the bars and peered between them. He looked through the *Spider* and did not see him.

"Hey!" he sent his shout ringing down the corridor. "Hey, the *Spider* ain't in his cell! Hey, keeper, bring them keys! The *Spider* ain't in his cell!"

Wentworth stood quietly waiting beside the cell door, back to the wall. He had the advantage over the keeper. It would never occur to the keeper that the guard could be mistaken about such a simple thing as whether or not a cell was empty. All of the men expected the *Spider* to escape. These things gave the Master of Men the advantage in his desperate battle.

So he stood motionless against the wall while the guard yelled that the cell was empty. Not until the keeper was racing down the corridor did the *Spider* move at all. He swept the skirt of his cape up over his face and stood in black shadow, a thickening of its darkness and no more. He was easy enough to see if a man looked carefully.

But one trusted man was screaming that he had escaped; the keeper had expected him to escape. . . Wentworth nodded his head and waited. They would open the door! He asked for no more than that!

The keeper swore jaggedly, "He couldn't of got out," he said. "He couldn't of got out. You can't get out of that cell."

"Well, the cell is empty. Open it up, and we'll search it. But I'm telling you. . . ."

The keeper swore, peering into the darkness of the cell. He jangled keys, and the door of cool-hardened steel swung open. . . .

The *Spider* struck!

Wentworth made a strong leap, and his stiffened fingers prodded nerve centers in the throat of the head keeper. The man slumped against the guard.

"The keeper has fainted," Wentworth whispered to the guard. "The keeper has fainted because the *Spider* has escaped!"

The guard repeated the words in a shout, and the *Spider* slid down the corridor. He was at the outer door when the surgeon came at a run. A prod and a leap, and he was out and racing through headquarters toward the street. He had picked up a revolver from the police surgeon, but those six cartridges were his all. Not that he would use it against the police.

The *Spider* was smiling thinly as he darted toward the street. No, he would not use the gun against the police . . . but he thought he would not lack for targets!

The *Spider* raced into the street,



Flame shot scores of feet into the air!

whirled a corner . . . and from the shadows stepped a small man with a brown face. He bowed and sucked in his breath politely.

"Pardon, *Spider san*," he murmured, "I have a message for you. The woman and her friend are our prisoners. Two of your men are our prisoners. If you surrender to me, they will be released. Refuse, and they will die . . . graciously!"

WENTWORTH flung back his head and the laughter of the *Spider* rang through the street, bitter, defiant, and mocking. He caught the man by the waist and flicked him high over his head, and in the same instant the secret guns which the *Spider* had spotted opened fire upon him!

Their converging cross fire ripped through the jerking small body the *Spider* held above him as a shield . . . and then the *Spider* dropped the body, and was in the shelter of one of the flanking buildings.

He made no effort to track down and kill the men who had attacked him. He did not even draw his captured revolver and fire a single shot toward the hidden guns. Instead, he fled through the building as if all the hounds of hell were behind him.

His breath was a sob in his throat. He knew that the small Japanese had spoken literal truth when he had announced Nita's capture with the other three. Nor did he doubt the fulfillment of the threat that Dr. Fuji had mouthed. Dr. Fuji, like the police after the *Spider's* capture, had expected his escape—and had prepared.

There was a cold and bitter pain in the *Spider's* breast now as he ran. But there was no slacking of his speed. He had not escaped the prison cell to play at heroics with guns in the dark. Nor even to rescue the woman he loved from horrid death! The fate of a nation ran

with him furtively, hounded by the police, through the dark streets of the city!

He leaped presently into a taxi and prodded the driver with his gun barrel. "Out!" he ordered.

The driver spilled out and the *Spider* sent the cab leaping into the street. He had to reach naval headquarters at once. There was no telling where, in the dark waters of the harbor, were the one-man torpedoes of the Japanese. No telling either, at what moment they were scheduled to strike! Even as he raced through city streets, the killers might be ready to detonate their destructive charges against the sides of the navy's battleships!

Minutes later, the *Spider* checked to toss against the naval building's side the silken line that was known as his Web. It snared a hold, and he went up it hand over hand. He checked on the sill of a window, and heard a rasping voice within, speaking into a phone.

Wentworth waited until the voice ceased to speak, and then he went through the window in a foot-first leap that hurled broken glass across half the room. Instantly, he was crouched across the desk, a gun prodding the fat ribs of the naval commandant.

"I am the *Spider*," Wentworth said sharply, swiftly. "I bring you news of a Japanese attempt to destroy the fleet! They had a squadron of one-man torpedoes here in the harbor. Sometime tonight—I do not know the hour—those one-man torpedoes will be directed against the fleet by suicidal crews! You must get all your ships in motion without delay, throw out torpedo nets, set your mosquito boats and planes to combing the harbor!"

The naval commandant finally got his breath. "The guard!" he shouted. "Orderly, call out the guard!"

Wentworth swore and ducked behind the commandant. "I am going to publish over the radio and through the newspapers

(Continued on page 97)

(Concluded from page 8)

seal (with pencil) came out so soon, and you will find my quarter and coupon enclosed. . . . I think this idea will interest you: I am taking my *Spider* magazines and binding them into books. I want to use scarlet-and-black satin to cover them. I'll let you know how it works out. I am putting two novels in each book, with *The Web* and any editorials. Thus, I will always have my favorite stories at hand. . . ."

I shall anxiously await Miss Combs' report on the results of her book-binding efforts. Her idea seems awfully good to me, and it wouldn't surprise me if many readers wrote in to inquire just how Miss Combs tackled the job. Perhaps I may soon publish another letter from her, giving the details as to how she cut the satin, how she accomplished the binding itself, etc.

Good luck, Miss Combs!

DAN DAY MORGAN, JR., of Archer City, Texas, wants the sinister face of the *Spider* to appear on the magazine cover, but he says that he still buys the magazine—even if the *Spider* wears the black mask. Dan also wants the *Spider's* adventures to be published as a "comic" and on the radio.

Personally, I feel that much of the value of the *Spider's* character, and much of the colorful action—and *all* of Grant Stockbridge's powerful writing would be lost in a so-called comic publication.

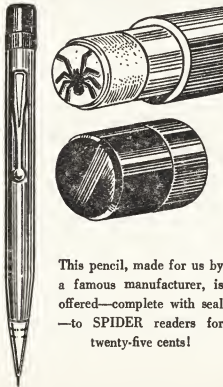
* * *

I will close with a quotation from a letter written by *Jack Kilbourne*, of Stewartstown, Pennsylvania:

"I have just finished 'The Benevolent Order of Death.' Wow! What dynamite! Richard Wentworth, in my estimation, rates a Congressional Medal!"

I agree!

THE CHIEF



This pencil, made for us by a famous manufacturer, is offered—complete with seal—to SPIDER readers for twenty-five cents!

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Editor of the SPIDER MAGAZINE
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I am enclosing 25c in coin or stamps for your new mechanical pencil, containing a rubber-stamp reproduction of the *Spider* seal. This is to be sent to me postage prepaid.

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(State)

Bargain Counter Corpse

Another "Doc Turner" Thriller

By Arthur Leo Zagat



The big hat tumbled to the floor . . . and some one screamed. . . .

Tracy's Department Store boasted it could undersell all competitors on every item—but that didn't include the corpse of the young working girl Doc Turner thought to be the keystone of a novel and horrible racket!

ANDREW TURNER awoke all at once, as an old man does, to find that his dream had become a nightmare of reality.

The desolate landscape of his dream was now the lodging house bedroom that

for so many years had been to him, not home, but the place where he spent the few midnight-to-morning hours away from his ancient drugstore on Morris Street. His dream's eerie, shadowless light was now a grimy dawn seeping in to give the

shabby, scant furniture oddly menacing outlines. And, impossibly gigantic in the gray luminescence, a faceless form loomed blackly over him.

Only one thing was sharp and distinct and unquestionably real—the steely glitter of the knife-blade that had pricked his throat and now hung above it, poised.

Outside the open window was the nocturnal growl of the unsleeping city, the rattle of an El train, a sick infant's petulant whine—and the rasp of the radio in a police prowl car, just below! But Doc Turner knew that the instant he opened his mouth to cry for help, silencing steel would slice down.

His white-haired head lay very still on its pillow, but the tobacco-stained bush of his mustache moved with a faint smile. "The pose," he said gently, "is, I confess, frightening. But what are you after?"

The intruder stirred. "What did Jennie Marshall tell you last night," the black mask whispered, "in the back of your store?"

"Nothing concerning anyone but herself." This was the exact truth. "And her young man. He is being inducted into the army day after tomorrow, and she wanted me to persuade him to marry her before she goes. But I pointed out that unless he loved her enough to marry her without persuasion, it would be wiser to wait till he comes back and see how they both feel then."

"You 'phoned someone, and she got in the booth with you. Who was it?"

Doc's faded blue eyes narrowed, but in his long years of battling the human wolves who prey on the bewildered aliens and helpless, friendless poor of the slum he served, he'd learned not to quibble with a gun or knife. "She'd given up her job at Tracy's Department Store, sure that she was getting married, and it is already filled. They've a long waiting list. I called the home of a friend of mine to try and place Jennie with him. He liked the way

she talked over the 'phone, instructed her to report for an interview early this morning."

"You lie!" The masked man crouched lower, his black garb whispering against the bed's side-rail. "Come clean, if you want to live."

There was no fear in the old man's wrinkle-netted countenance. "Live?" he murmured. "For another year or two? I wonder. At any rate, I'm too old to be afraid of dying."

The knife moved, slowly, till it hovered ominously above his blanket-covered abdomen. "The way you'll die, Turner, you'd better fear. Talk. Who'd you tell what the Marshall skirt spilled?"

"Whom," the pharmacist sighed. "Whom did—" and his right arm which Doc covertly had worked out from under the blanket-edge, circled the black-clad legs, jerked them hard as his left hand flung up the blanket to tangle the knife.

The aged muscles were feeble, but for a split-second surprise was as effective as strength. The man in the mask staggered. He recovered almost at once, but not in time to prevent Doc from leaping out the other side of the cot, or choke his incoherent yell as he grasped the door knob.

The door was locked! He snatched for the key, turned it, but the black form had vaulted the bed and hurtled at him, steel flailing.

Turner dropped under the knife's lethal arc, half-somersaulted, half-rolled from the attacker's path. "Help!" he yelled, and a shout answered. The door opened and the masked man dived into the dark corridor that suddenly was clamorous with feminine screams. A man shouting, "What the hell's going on?"

But the masked man had vanished before anyone ventured into the hall.

"It was a nightmare," Doc Turner told his fellow lodgers. "I fell out of bed

and woke up shouting. It's nothing. . . ."



THE morning sunlight, shadow-grilled by the trestle of the El, laid itself on the white-painted shelves and heavy-framed, out-dated showcases of the old drugstore on Morris Street.

"I don't get you, Doc," Jack Ransom said as he scratched his thatch of carrot hair. "I don't see why you covered it up. Why didn't you call the cops?"

"What would have been gained?" Doc Turner asked the barrel-chested young garage mechanic who so often aided him in his unofficial, but exceedingly effective war on crime. "Except to terrify the people who live in that house? I couldn't describe the fellow. Even his voice was disguised. I could not identify him if at this very moment he were to walk in through that door."

He looked broodingly out into the hurly-burly of the slum's principal thoroughfare. Trucks rumbled in the asphalted gutter. Hucksters stripped tarpaulins from the pushcarts aligned at the curb, exposing rosy apples, green-framed, creamy cauliflower, vividly yellow stands of bananas and tangerines. The laborers and factory hands had already gone to their daily toil; now at eight-thirty the white-collar workers, stenographers and errand boys hastened along the cracked sidewalk.

"Look at those girls," Doc exclaimed. "Heads high, eyes bright, smartly dressed as any Garden Avenue debutante at a cost per year that wouldn't keep a socialite in perfume for a week. Aren't they grand youngsters, Jack?"

"Yeah," Jack grunted. "They're all right, but what's the idea changing the subject?"

"I'm not, son. I have a sneaking suspicion that what happened to me last night very directly concerns those fine young people."

"Huh? Oh, I get it. This Jennie Marshall—"

"Is one of them. A lovely child, about eighteen, pretty as a picture and smart as a whip. But she's an orphan just about getting along, in a furnished room she shares with two other girls. I cannot imagine why anyone should threaten murder to find out what she had to say to me, unless," the old man put a blue-veined, transparent-skinned hand on Ransom's sleeve, "unless this is another instance of the sort of thing we've been up against time and time again."

A muscle twitched in the youth's freckle-dusted cheek. "You mean he figured she'd spilled the dope to you on some racket that's working a whole bunch like her? Some racket designed to nick a little bit from each one of the thousands of them?"

"Yes—and a racket which he thought I'd already started machinery to crush," Doc murmured. "Precisely. Which means we—" A phone bell shrilled from the booth behind him.

When he came out of the booth, a half minute later, his eyes were oddly expressionless. "Jack," he said softly. "That was the specialty-shop proprietor with whom Jennie Marshall had an appointment at eight this morning. He 'phoned to tell me that she hadn't arrived yet and that if she couldn't be punctual, he couldn't employ her even as a favor to me."

"So she let you down, eh? Well it just goes to show—"

"I want to know what it goes to show," the old druggist interrupted. "Here's her address." He brought a slip of paper out of the pocket of his threadbare alpaca coat. "Five-twenty Hogbunt Lane. Please go there and find out why Jennie didn't keep her appointment."

What Jack Ransom found out, when he'd climbed three flights of malodorous tenement stairs and interviewed the slattern woman who rented furnished rooms

at two dollars a week, three in a room, was that Jennie Marshall had never come home last night.

"You might ask Ben Cartin," she smirked, "he's her boy friend." She told Jack where Ben worked, as shipping clerk.

But Ben Cartin, a sallow and pimply-faced shipping clerk, swore that he had not seen her since she had left him in a huff, yesterday evening, and he proved it.

Nor could anyone else be found who had seen the girl after she left Doc Turner's drugstore on Morris Street. No one at all.

THE One Day Sale of Thirty-Dollar rayon sport ensembles, three pieces for six ninety-seven, was the most successful promotion Miss Jameson ever

wire, and—"Look," the same girl said, her tone still flat with a horror too terrible quite to be realized yet. "Her lips are taped together."

And then, in the split-second before pandemonium broke, a raucous voice shouted from nowhere. "*It's the squealer's sign. She talked too much.*"

In that screaming, fainting, fighting mob of women, who could spot the man who shouted that?



THE finding of Jennie Marshall was not known to Morris Street till the girls and the young men who worked at Tracy's (there were many in the neighborhood) returned to it, very late

Arthur Leo Zagat, the creator of Doc Turner, appears regularly in our companion publication, *Strange Detective Mysteries*. Read his superb short story, *THE HOUSE THAT WASN'T THERE*, for a new thrill in mystery fiction. It's in the current issue—now on sale!

put over. From the minute Tracy's opened, the fifth floor was a riot. By eleven it was a seething sea of excited customers.

But no bargain rush could for long vanquish Miss Jameson's sense of order. When she noticed, around four in the afternoon, a blond dummy leaning against a pillar, she dropped everything to go over and straighten it herself.

She grabbed hold of its dangling arms—and screamed!

That scream struck the fifth floor dumb, motionless for a half-minute. The cartwheel hat dropped from the dummy's blond curls, revealed its pert-featured, small face. "My Gawd!" some salesgirl said, not loud but very audibly in that awful hush. "It's Jennie Marshall!"

It was the *corpse* of Jennie Marshall, fastened to that pillar by almost invisible

because of the long and wholly futile police interrogation.

The murder of an unemployed salesgirl, even by the rather unusual method of asphyxiation with ether, did not warrant special radio bulletins, and the injury of a number of stampeding shoppers was a matter that Tracy's had relegated to the back pages of the newspapers.

Those of Jennie's ex-co-workers who dropped into Doc's on their way home answered his questions in monosyllables if at all, and left in almost discourteous haste. "They're frightened," he told Jack Ranson when the carrot-headed youth showed up. "They're almost too terrified to think, much less talk about it. Which, of course, must have been the reason for that grisly demonstration."

The hoarse shouts of the peddlers came

in from outside, the shuffle of the slow moving throng that crowded Morris Street in the glare of the huge bulbs strung over the pushcarts, a jabber of talk in a dozen foreign tongues. "How the hell," Jack groaned, "did they ever get the corpse set up without being caught?"

"Easily enough, son. That gigantic department store has hundreds of employees who know only those in their own departments. Do you think anyone would recognize an imposter a porter in the regular store uniform, swapping a body for a dummy in the crush of that bargain sale? He probably used one of those big crates-on-wheels they're continually pushing through the aisles."

"Yeah, I guess you're right. It was easy enough for anyone who had the nerve."

"And the imagination, son," Doc Turner added, his gnarled fingers beating a tattoo on a showcase edge. "The strange, twisted imagination that also suggested covering the whole face of the man who invaded my room with a featureless mask. The macabre imagination that etched the blade of his knife with a mouse in the jaws of a cat. We're up against a ruthless criminal, my boy."

Knotting small muscles ridged Jack's blunt jaw. "Yeah. I see what you mean. Look, Doc. You've still got that knife, haven't you?"

"Yes. But it is an ordinary hunting knife such as may be bought in any hardware store. Its only distinguishing mark is that etching, and that was done by the owner. I'm afraid it cannot help us—yet."

His eyes sullen, Jack gazed out at the shawled housewives, the hundreds of swarthy and pallid faces that moved past the doorway. "I've got a hunch one of them's out there somewhere, watching you. They know you're trying to stop them, whatever racket they've got, and they're snickering up their sleeves because they know you haven't a chance to."

"That's the handicap of having a reputation." Old Doc Turner smiled wanly. "And one more proof that their leader is no ordinary criminal. He knew that anyone who has attempted to prey on my people has found he had me to deal with, and so he had me watched right from the start."

"Which was poor Jennie's hard luck," Jack agreed soberly. "It looks like he's got us stymied, Doc. After what happened to her, it will be a miracle if we even find out what it's all about when it's all over."

"I shall find that out, Jack, and stop it." The nostrils of Doc's big nose flared. "I think you mentioned," he murmured, "that Mary and Helen, the two girls with whom Jennie roomed, also worked at Tracy's in the same department."

The youth turned, his face graying. "Gosh, Doc! Don't you think those birds are smart enough to figure you'll try to pump those two kids? What do you want to do, have them bumped off too?"

Andrew Turner did not answer. But his old eyes were steely.



GRIEF, fear even, cannot for long keep sleep from young bodies exhausted by work and strain and excitement, even if memories of horror make that sleep restless and unrefreshing.

In the dreary small bedroom on the third floor of Five-twenty Hogbound Lane, Jennie Marshall's bed was empty, but on the pillows of the big double bed that took up almost all the rest of the space, lay an auburn-ringletted head and one whose raven-black hair was pulled back from an olive forehead by the ribboned pigtail. Though an electric bulb still burned, the eyes of redhead and brunette were closed, their young faces, wistfully childlike with the rouge and lipstick washed from them, relaxed.

Helen Reilly, the redhead, kept tossing

from side to side. Every so often Leah Meyers would whimper in her sleep. The slightest unfamiliar sound, it was plain, would awaken them both, screaming.

The slightest sound. But not the odor, faint at first, that stole into the room from the fire escape outside the window.

A distant tower clock bonged once. One o'clock.

Gradually, very gradually, the odor became stronger in the room, the sweetly pungent odor of ether that had still been perceptible about Jennie Marshall's lips when she'd been cut free from the pillar in Tracy's. Gradually Helen's tossings ceased, and the moaning in Leah's throat. Now they slept *too* soundly.

Too soundly.

Leah awoke, her head throbbing. A scream rose in her throat, but the palm clamped over her mouth stifled it. She stared into the eyes that glittered down at her, then the rest of the face cleared and the terror became only amazement.

A finger lay against the mustached mouth at which she stared. The palm was removed. "Doc," Leah whispered. "Doc Turner! What—"

"Wait." The old druggist reached

across her, took hold of Helen's flaccid wrist and pressed fingertips on her pulse. "She's all right," he sighed. "She is nearer the window and so inhaled more of the ether fumes than you did." Fumbling two clean handkerchiefs out of the pocket of his shabby coat, he smiled apologetically. "I hate to do this, but I can't watch her to keep her from crying out and talk to you at the same time." He made a tight roll of one of the kerchiefs and placed it between the girl's teeth; then he used the other to tie it in place.

"Now, my dear," he whispered, settling wearily down on the edge of the bed. "No, one can possibly know that I am here or that I have been here. You are quite safe in telling me all about it."

"About—" Leah's complexion was no longer olive-tinted, but greenish with pallor. "About what?"

"About what's going on at Tracy's, of course. Someone is preying on you young people who work there, and I—"

"You—you can't stop them, Doc." Fear shone in her dark eyes. "They—they're devils."

"I expect they are, but I've snared devils before—and I'll snare these." A



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feeble old man he was, wrinkled and stooped with age, his blue eyes faded. But the quiet conviction in his voice conveyed confidence. "How much are they taking from you?"

"A—a dollar-sixty every week. Ten percent of my sixteen-dollar salary."

"A dollar-sixty. It's a lot to you, but it doesn't sound like much to murder for. Multiply it by the ten thousand who work in that gigantic department store—"

"They don't all pay in, Doc. Only the junior salesmen and small-salaried employees below them."

"Ahhh." The look that came to Andrew Turner's face was one that many a criminal had recalled—sadly. And there were some who had seen that look just once—without recalling anything ever again! "Only the little people; the most defenseless. How many of those would you say there are at Tracy's?"

"I—I don't know exactly. Almost four thousand, I guess."

"Quite enough. All right, Leah. How do they induce you to pay?"

"We—it started a couple weeks ago. One Thursday one of the stock boys fell down an elevator shaft and got killed. We all thought it was an accident. When we went to our lockers to get our street clothes each of us found a printed slip that said, 'One more, tomorrow,' but we just laughed about it, thinking somebody was having some kind of joke. We waited to see what would happen on Friday."

"And what did?"

"A girl—Martha Trotter—fell through a window on the employee's staircase, between the seventh and eighth floors. It was just at quitting time, and she struck the street right in front of where everybody was coming out. She—"

"Yes," the old druggist interrupted. "I understand. And after that?"

"After that was another printed slip appeared in our lockers, Saturday morning. What this one said was, 'You need

protection against such accidents as occurred to Tom Jenks—' that's the boy who fell down the elevator shaft—'and Martha Trotter. Premium, ten percent of your pay check.' We—of course we all knew what it meant by 'protection.'"

"Of course. You are all of the post-Capone generation. But even if those slips were traced back to their originator, it could not be proved in any court that they were not simply advertisements for some form of accident insurance—although the rate is too high. Go on, Leah. To whom were you to pay this so-called premium?"

"There was a different agent for each department. The name on my slip . . ." The girl hesitated.

"Go on," Doc urged, leaning forward eagerly. "That's the most important of all. It is through that agent I shall be able to reach the master mind. Who is it?"

The girl's lips parted. Helen, awake now, gurgled in an evident attempt to stop her, but too late.

"Jennie Marshall," Leah Meyer's said.

THE bed spring creaked as the old man started. "Jennie Marshall—your own roommate was a member of the extortion gang, and—"

"No!" Leah caught at the druggist's arm. "No, Doc. Jennie wasn't any more in that gang than me or Helen. She didn't know any more about them than we do. Please—"

"But—"

"Listen, Doc," the girl pleaded, her eyes starry with unshed tears. "Please listen to me. Jennie told us—she told us she was scared into collecting the money and turning it over, just like we were scared into paying it. But she never saw who she gave it to. She was awful scared, Jennie was. That's why she quit Tracey's, to get out of it all. We couldn't quit, we had to have jobs to live on, but Jennie figured Ben and her would get married and they'd let him out of the draft. And

then he told her it was too late for him to get out of the draft and he wouldn't marry her— Oh, Doc Turner. You've got to believe Jennie wasn't in that awful gang."

"Of course I do," the old pharmacist said, soothingly. "Even if I didn't know Jennie well enough to know she wouldn't willingly get mixed up in this thing, the fiend who is engineering it would never involve himself with a hundred or more confederates. How did he arrange the final step in the collection?"

Leah spread her hand wide. "I don't know. Jennie didn't tell us. She only told us as much as she did because we were her best friends and she couldn't stand us hating her. Honest Injun, Doc." Her eyes widened. "Gee! We were awful worried, Helen and me, when she didn't come home last night, but we didn't dare say a word. We even joked about it to that snoopy landlady. We said—"

Helen jerked up, gurgling behind the gag she'd been to absorbed to remove, her hand pointing past Doc. He turned and saw the key turning in the lock! He lifted to his feet as the lock clicked.

The door opened and a revolver thrust in, fisted by a black glove. "I rather thought I'd find you here," said the tall, black-clad man who followed the gun into the room, "when you managed to elude the inept fool I had watching you."

Another man came in, his left hand holding an automatic, in his right the long-nosed pliers with which he'd turned the key from the outside. He shut the door.

Neither of the two was masked, and this was somehow ominous. The one who'd first entered was tall and lithe, graying at the temples, his long, narrow countenance graven with lines of bitterness, his mouth the too-small, too-red mouth of cruelty. His eyes slid past Doc to the bed, and deep within them was a flicker as of sheet lightning. "It is a shame to kill these young ladies."

"You said it, boss," agreed the other fellow, burlier, grosser in build and visage. The old druggist recognized, more by timbre than intonation, the voice that had spoken through a black mask the night before.

"I will do all the talking necessary, Gus," the tall man said, coldly. "Get over to that window and make sure the coast is clear."

Gus went around the bed to lean out of the window that Doc had left wide open. "You have no reason to kill these girls," the latter said, his tone as calm as though he were discussing the sale of a hot water bottle. "They know nothing at all—"

"So I learned, listening in on your interesting conversation." The old man became aware that the smell of ether had suddenly become stronger in the room. "But pardon me, Mr. Turner, I forget that I have the advantage of you. I am—well, the alias I am using at present is Martin Gadsden. My—accomplice, I suppose you would call him—is Gus Roscoe." Gadsden's look shifted to the bed again. "I imagine the auburn-tressed lass is Helen Reilly, and the other undoubtedly is Leah—er—Meyers. Yes?"

Doc's eyes were as hard, as coldly ferocious, as Gadsden's own. "May I suggest, Mr. Gadsden, that your badinage is in as bad taste as your cat-and-mouse act? Murder us, if that's what you intend, and get through with it."

Gadsden smiled, frostily. "I intend to murder all three of you," he purred, "but in my own good time. I rather imagine that I shall soon have to make another demonstration of the value of—accident insurance, and the Misses Meyers and Reilly will serve me very well as subjects. As for you, Mr. Turner. . . ."

HIS lids narrowed, and two white spots bloomed either side his thin, saturnine nose. "Last week, a very dear friend of mine died in the prison

where you had him incarcerated for a life term. I feel that I owe it to him that your own death shall be more lingering than I can arrange in this room."

Gadsden's left hand dropped into the pocket of his black jacket. "You know what this is, of course." He produced a gleaming hypodermic syringe. "It contains a rather large dose of scopalamine hydrobromide, the drug that renders a person amenable to orders."

"I don't need a lecture on *materia medica*," Doc snapped.

"Granted," Gadsden bowed. "I merely thought you might be interested in hearing about some of the ways in which I have used it for criminal purposes. However," he shrugged, "since you are not, suppose we proceed. Are you watching him, Gus?"

"You bet," Roscoe answered from the window, his automatic snouting at Doc Turner.

"Very well." Gadsden turned to the bed. "Your arm, please, Miss Meyers. Your right arm."

One could see the scream swelling the girl's throat, the terrible look in her dark eyes as of a snake-hypnotized bird. She lifted her arm to Gadsden.

He put his revolver in his pocket, transferred the glittering syringe to his right hand and bent to take hold of Leah's wrist with his left. Gus Roscoe bent over in a ludicrous imitation of his chief, and suddenly, oddly, toppled to the floor. Doc leaped, like a white-headed cat, on Gadsden's back.

Leah Meyers screamed then as another dark form surged in through the window. Gadsden, half-bent, whirled like a dervish. Doc lost his hold and flew from his perch, thudded into a wall. Gadsden clawed his revolver from his pocket.

Gun-crash drowned Leah's scream and an orange-red flare jetted across the room. Again, Martin Gadsden, jolted by the first shot, went down with the second, was a

sprawled, inanimate heap on the floor.

"Doc," Jack Ransom yelled, darting around the end of the big bed, Gus's automatic still clenched in his big fist. "Are you hurt, Doc? Are you all right?"

"A little dazed, son, but quite all right." Faded blue eyes peered up at the carrot-headed youth. "You were down there in the backyard, as I suspected."

"Damn right, I was. I tracked you here and watched you climb the fire escape. I parked myself in a basement doorway across there, where I could watch, look and listen. When I saw that gorilla stick his head out, I decided it was time I climbed up, cat-footed, and sure enough I see him standing with his back to me, holding a gun on you. So I gave him the old rabbit-punch, and grabbed his heater just in time to use it on your little playmate. Say! You didn't imagine I'd let you go wandering around the neighborhood after midnight, with a pack of killers on your trail, did you?"

"No, Jack. I haven't enough imagination for that." Doc Turner gestured wearily to the dead man. "That was what beat him at the last. Too much imagination. He wasn't content with merely shooting me tonight, or having me knifed yesterday. No. He had to flaunt a warning first. He had to use scopalamine on me and the girls, and take us to his den under our own power. He wasn't content even to march us down the stairs. He imagined I must have found a safer and more discreet way of getting in and out of here, and he had to send Gus to see if the coast was clear. He had to keep talking long enough for you to climb up here, because he imagined my calm defiance must conceal some plan to trap him. Well," the tired old pharmacist sighed. "Mr. Gadsden's imagination cost him very dear."

"If you ask me, Doc," Jack grinned. "Anybody bucks up against you, imagination or not, isn't buying any bargains."

(Continued from page 86)

the truth of this interview," he said harshly. "If I do that, when the torpedoes strike, you will be shot for treason!"

"The guard!" the naval commandant bawled. "Orderly, the guard! There's an assassin here!"

The orderly burst in, gun in hand. The *Spider* was crouched behind the commandant. "Orderly," he shouted, "the fleet is going to be torpedoed by Japanese tonight. Spread the word!"

The orderly had his gun lifted and ready, and the *Spider* smashed a bullet through the light, leaped to the window sill. He had the naval commander's phone in his fist!



SWIFTLY, he rasped into it in imitation of the officer's voice: "Order out all planes in the naval district! Fully loaded machine guns. Twenty-pound bombs! There is going to be an attack on the fleet tonight, by submarines! These planes must be ready, with full crews, to take off in ten minutes!"

A head and a gun poked out the window beside the *Spider*. He hurled the phone at the man, went down his slim silken strip of Web at a burning pace.

The taxi whined into a turn, and once more the *Spider* was racing across the city. He could spend hours in trying to persuade officials to act, and they would make some sort of token defense in the end . . . too late to accomplish anything at all. It was not prestige that was important. The very fate of the United States hinged on whether he managed to save the fleet!

Within ten minutes, Wentworth wheeled the taxi onto the nearest flying field of the navy. The planes were on the line with motors turning over steadily. The flying officers were just trooping out toward the waiting ships, and the *Spider*

could see their excitement in the gestures of their arms, in the quick way their heads tipped back to survey the skies.

The *Spider* hurled his taxi directly toward the planes. Moments ahead of the first officer, he reached a poised Grumman Fighter. A mechanic leaped at him, and was knocked helpless. Then the *Spider* leaped to the wing of the plane!

The *Spider* was bare-headed. His cape flattened against his body, streamed out into the wind in the wash of the propeller. He lifted his arms and his voice reached out strongly, terribly across the night.

"Men of the American Navy!" he called to them. "The fleet is being attacked by a squadron of one-man submarines! By suicide squads of Japanese! Some of you know me. I am the *Spider*! I fly this plane in the defense, and in the name, of the United States of America!"

He leaped to the cockpit, and instantly the motor roared wide open. The plane clawed into the air in a space of yards and the *Spider* hurtled it, scarcely troubling to lift a hundred feet above the ground, straight toward the harbor and the anchored fleet, whose lights were blinking, whose powerful flashlights reached out suddenly inquiring fingers against the sky.

Behind him, the powerful fighters were peeling off the ground in a long ragged line. No formation this, at first. The fighters were racing after him, tearing across the black sky of night toward the harbor and the navy's fleet. For a few breathless moments, the *Spider* dared to hope. Perhaps they had heard and believed him. Perhaps, they would join his swift patrol for the killers of the deep!

Ahead of him, silhouetted against the light-washed night sky, the *Spider* saw a formation of naval fighters from another field. He saw them . . . and ignored them. His eyes were on the deeps of the harbor. The surface glinted with a thousand lights. There was only a dim chance that,



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THE SPIDER

at night, he would be able to spot the movement of the one-man submarines beneath the surface!

Abruptly, a shout tore at Wentworth's throat! He spotted a white froth of water less than a half mile from the side of the largest of the navy's new battleships! It was cutting a white and unswerving streak, straight toward the vessel.

Wentworth sent his plane in a screaming dive straight toward that white wash of death. As he hurled the plane forward, he ripped at the radio mike and slapped the larynx button against his throat.

"The *Spider* speaking!" he spoke rapidly. "Torpedo headed for Battleship South Dakota! Torpedo headed for battleship South Dakota. Starboard side, two points off quarter. Fighter formation . . . this is the *Spider*. I am diving on the torpedo."

He flipped up the tail of the Grumman and went straight down . . . and in the same moment, the fighter formation over his head began to break up. Two of the planes peeled off, screaming in his wake.

For that one moment, the *Spider* dared to hope. Perhaps they were listening, would believe. Perhaps, they, too, were diving on the torpedo. In the same moment, his hopes died.

From the nozzles of those two ships' multiple guns, flame licked out and the night was criss-crossed with their tracer bullets. Their cannon spat their gushes of flame, and shells screamed past the *Spider*.

And he ignored them. While the deathly bullets screamed, he held his nose on the torpedo, and reached for the bomb stick.

His fighter quivered with the lash of bullets. Wind screamed at him through torn holes in the cockpit hood. And the *Spider* paid no heed . . . only kept the nose pointed toward the path of that white wake that would spell death and destruc-

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THE SPIDER

tion to two thousand men, and the wreck of the navy's biggest ship if he did not succeed in this single dive!

Wentworth pulled the bomb lever!

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

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EVEN as Wentworth released the bombs, he lifted the nose of the Grumman. That fact alone saved his life. The surge of the powerful plane blacked him out for instants, but even in the darkness, he felt the plane stagger hideously.

It lifted, and then he was aware of the torn fabric of a wing and the fuselage behind him. The terrific firepower of one of the diving planes had caught him!

That much he saw, and then whirling the ship in a vertical bank, he saw his bombs strike the water twenty feet ahead of the white wake he had spotted. There was an instantaneous, incredible explosion. Flame shot scores of feet into the air. Wentworth's plane staggered.

Instantly, Wentworth had the microphone against his throat. "Spider speaking!" he cried. "I just bombed a submarine-torpedo off the starboard quarter of the South Dakota! Warning to all ships: Keep a sharp lookout and signal to planes in case of torpedo attack! The sea is alive with Japanese one-man suicide subs!"

More planes were stabbing down the heavens toward him, but now the great battleships were springing to life. Wentworth saw crews racing to fire stations. The lights blinked frantically and the long, sweeping fingers of the searchlights began to stammer in signals.

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THE SPIDER

tered into action. Abruptly, a half mile ahead, there was a flashing roar and a destroyer, just getting under weigh, staggered and was consumed in a gushing roar of upward leaping flame!

She had blundered across the path of a torpedo destined for the North Carolina!

Wentworth wheeled his plane about and streaked for the shore. What could be done here, he had done. The fighters had peeled off his tail and, in screaming circles, or tearing dives, they were lashing the sky to fury in their attack on the one-man submarines of the Samurai!

But the *Spider's* plane was limping badly. The motor shuddered and shook the fuselage like an angry dog. He held it level not three hundred feet above the surface of the water, and headed straight over the heart of Manhattan. There was a bitter anger in the heart of the *Spider*—for his real work was only begun!

Somewhere here, Dr. Fuji still lurked . . . and Lona Deeping, his slave, was in the arms of Stanley Kirkpatrick!

Wentworth flung back his head, and hard laughter leaped from his lips. He tossed the ship a thousand feet into the air then, as he allowed it to point its wounded nose toward the breast of the East River, the *Spider* leaped from the cockpit, yanked the rip-cord.

The roofs of the city leaped upward to meet him and his eyes stabbed in swift keenness over the light-streaked scene beneath him. Behind, over the waters of the city, machine guns hammered and racketed and the motors of a hundred planes filled the air with thunder. There were the deep tearing reverberations of bombs. Into the streets, the people were flooding. Lights flashed on in a thousand windows, and men and women began to pour out on roof tops. The searchlights of the battleships stabbed at the breast of the night, and at the black waters.

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THE SPIDER

Then the roofs were at his feet and he tumbled down upon the gravel of an apartment top. A block away was the building in which Kirkpatrick lived, and Wentworth hurled himself at the steps. His head was bare and the lank black hair of the *Spider* swung out from his temples, and the black cape of the *Spider* kited from his shoulders.

Presently the building in which Kirkpatrick lived loomed ahead, and then Wentworth spotted a compact group of people. There were two men and two women, and they walked toward the entrance of the apartment.

A glad shout of welcome lifted to Wentworth's lips . . . and died there.

Those four were the four he sought: Nita van Sloan and Marianne walked ahead. Behind them tottered and staggered the two wounded warriors, Ram Singh and Jackson. But they tottered, not as injured weakened men, but as those who have no guiding soul.

THERE was a curious cold certainty in their walk and the *Spider* raced toward them on silent feet, and checked in the shadows. The eyes of Nita van Sloan were set and bitter; and the face of Marianne was twisted into ugliness by hate. These could not be the normal faces of those he loved.

Wentworth shivered with the assault of their hatred, and then he did not speak. Instead he dashed ahead of them into the building, and fled upward toward the apartment of Kirkpatrick. Dr. Fuji apparently was running out of weapons! He had begun to repeat himself! For it was immediately clear to the *Spider* that Nita and the others had been hypnotized and turned loose upon Kirkpatrick; but more particularly on Lona Deeping.

The Samurai could not know yet whether his plan had won or failed;

SATAN'S SEVEN SWORDSMEN

whether his torpedoes would reduce the United States Navy to a second-rate force, or the gamble would be lost. But either way, it was essential to him that the last link remaining between him and the saboteurs should be destroyed:

Lona Deeping must die!

Wentworth knew that, and it lent spurs to his speed, and sudden hope to his heart! He bounded toward the door of Kirkpatrick's apartment, and the policeman on guard there whirled toward him. Wentworth's fist crashed to his jaw. He scooped up the officer's revolver and it kicked violently against his stiffened wrist. Three bullets he hurled into the lock of the door and then he kicked it, and went through, a gun in each hand, his cape flying in the wind.

Kirkpatrick wheeled out of the drawing room of his apartment, gun in his fist . . . and the *Spider* fired. His bullet clanged against the gun in Kirkpatrick's hand, struck it aside, and the *Spider* clipped him on the jaw an instant later. It drove Kirkpatrick backwards, stunned.

Wentworth leaped past him, and snatched up Lona Deeping bodily where she stood in the center of the drawing room. He tossed her across his shoulder and was gone even while Kirkpatrick staggered away from the wall, while his shouts lifted hoarsely.

But Wentworth had destroyed his gun with that one swift shot. Kirkpatrick had no weapon. He had only his brain. He flung himself at a telephone, and his orders began to rip out in swift and violent rhythm.

The *Spider* carried Lona Deeping toward the elevators. There were four in the bank, and he punched a button. One of the automatic cages came upward. Another was already on the way, and they clicked up steadily. The elevator in which Wentworth planned to escape was just one story below that which he knew

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A QUIVER shook through Lona Deeping, and her eyes closed for a moment. Wentworth whispered, and his voice was a hissing monotone.

"You have no will save only the will of Fuji," he said. "You are the slave of Fuji . . . and you know where Fuji is! You will go to Fuji!"

Lona shivered. "That was not the command," she whispered.

"You will go to Fuji!"

Wentworth saw her fighting for resolution and, suddenly, he struck her across the face. Her eyes flew wide under the shock of the blow. She staggered and gripped at the steel wall with her hands and slipped to her knee. The *Spider* watched her narrowly. Had he succeeded in snapping Fuji's control?

He did not speak again, but when the elevator reached the first floor he ripped open the door and carried Lona out. He threw her into the front seat of the Daimler which Nita had used, and he took the wheel.

"Where?" he demanded.

Lona Deeping's head lifted heavily. "East," she whispered.

He sent the big Daimler lunging forward as Nita and her allies slammed out of the apartment building, their guns opening fire. The hammering lead could not reach them in the bullet-proof Daimler. Wentworth saw them race to a taxi at the curb.

Presently, a police siren lifted its shrill, questing wail. And another. And another. Wentworth's smile was thin and harsh. Half the police force of the city would be on his trail within moments, and that was all right, too.

The *Spider* must charge into that hell-hole at all costs. Behind him would race his own supporters . . . and if he could break through to Fuji, and disrupt the command of his will, they would be added strength against the enemy.

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THE SPIDER

But if he failed; if Fuji retained command, and could turn his own love, his own supporters against him . . . there were still the police!

The *Spider* laughed, with triumph and despair mingled in his breast, and Lona Deeping touched his arm. "There," she said, choking. "There is the entrance to the last stronghold of . . ."

Wentworth nodded. He ran to a drug store on the corner, and fired over the head of the clerk . . . darted to a telephone. The clerk raced screaming into the street and Wentworth snatched up the telephone.

"The *Spider* just killed a man here," he shouted when he got through to the police, and he gave the address. "I just saw him go into a house four doors up the street. He's got a woman with him. He's kidnaping her!"

Wentworth raced into the street again, and Lona Deeping was entering the door she had pointed out. And the police were on the way. The spot would be sewed up, in no time. The *Spider* would be trapped . . . but Dr. Fuji also would be within the net.

He sprang to the doorway through which Lona Deeping was just stepping . . . and two great and powerful hands reached out of the darkness and seized him as if to twist his body apart!

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

The Way of Samurai

WENTWORTH had two guns in his fists because he had wanted, deliberately, to terrify the drug store clerk. The man would not forget. He had seen Wentworth dart into the doorway. He could not see the death that reached out for him there. Wentworth could not see the death himself. He knew that the hands that gripped him were huge

SATAN'S SEVEN SWORDSMEN

and intolerably powerful and that they stemmed from thick, hairy arms.

And he remembered that the F.B.I. man, Marks, had been . . . *torn to bits!*

Those guns in Wentworth's hands saved his life. He pointed their muzzles between those two twisting, tormenting hands and he began to pull the triggers. He hammered lead into the darkness, and there was a screaming, snarling horror there. Wentworth was picked up and hurled. He skated along the floor in darkness and crashed against a wall.

He rolled, pushed weakly up on one arm and knew that Lona Deeping had fallen with him. He could see the horror now. Broad against the lighter gray of the doorway, the thing filled the corridor with its broad shoulders.

It was a Great Ape!

Wentworth lifted his two guns with hands that shook from the mauling he had taken, and he pulled both triggers. The bullets crashed together into the minute brain of the ape . . . and it fell with a crash that made the floor tremble. Wentworth pressed to his feet and, without words, Lona Deeping led the way to the cellar door and downward.

In the street, Wentworth heard the squeal of brakes and knew that Nita and the others had arrived. The whimper of the sirens was very close.

The *Spider* went downward into darkness, led by a woman who was the slave of the man he sought . . . and followed by four who loved him, but also were slaves of the monster Samurai.

A door in the wall opened to Lona Deeping's touch, and Wentworth jammed it wide with a filled ash can. They went along a corridor, and Lona Deeping touched certain hidden spots, and the traps before them were locked. So they came finally to a dirt wall and Wentworth heard the faint ringing of chimes.

There was a silvery answering bell-



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THE SPIDER

note, and the wall slid aside . . . and the *Spider* bounded through!

With a blow, he knocked Lona Deeping unconscious to the floor. The gun in his right fist spoke once, and the man who stood behind Dr. Fuji was a quivering, dying man. But Dr. Fuji himself knelt upon his silken mat, and his eyes reached out to grip those of the *Spider*.

Dr. Fuji's lips smiled slowly. "You have come back, in accordance with my orders, slave," he whispered. "I conquered your will, and it must always bow to mine."

Wentworth laughed. He threw back his head and laughed. "Your will held dominion over mine for a brief hour," he said quietly. "But my will was stronger. Even though I was under drugs. Even though I had been injured, yet was my will strong enough to defeat yours! I did not kill Kirkpatrick. I did not destroy myself! Instead, I have returned . . . to destroy you, Most Foul!"

Dr. Fuji was throwing all his will into his cat eyes of yellow. The vertical pupils widened and expanded and the *Spider* gazed calmly into them, unshaken, undisturbed.

"Your plans have failed," he said. "Your samurai are all killed, and but a single destroyer of this nation was wrecked. Your plans to kill Lona Deeping failed. She led me here. Your plans to destroy my loved ones failed. They are here to support me. Even your will is failing you now. I am the stronger. In precisely five seconds, I am going to lift the gun in my right hand and blow out your brains, oh, Most Foul!"

The *Spider's* gun reached out from his side and he held it there, and began the slow, fateful count of the seconds. He put out of his mind the eager race of Nita and the others behind him, of the onrushing police. He put everything out of his mind except that he had the will to conquer and

SATAN'S SEVEN SWORDSMEN

destroy this man. He counted . . . and the perspiration popped out on the wrinkled skin of Dr. Fuji, and the withered lips began to quiver. He counted, and the will went out of those burning eyes, and the lids fluttered down.

He counted . . . and Dr. Fuji's right hand pressed hard to his left side, low down in the abdomen, and drew steadily across his body and turned upward a little. Blood stained his robe, and Dr. Fuji pitched forward on his face . . . dying. He had committed *hara-kiri* as even the gentlemen from hell must do, in accordance with the teachings of their ancestors.

RACING through the secret tunnels of Fuji, Nita van Sloan faltered and slowed to a halt. She looked about her, and the place was strange. And Marianne Jackson was looking at her, and

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THE SPIDER

Ram Singh was there, and Ronald Jackson. They looked at each other, and did not understand.

And the police poured into the building, and threw a tight cordon about the place. Stanley Kirkpatrick, the Commissioner, came striding into the hell-hole and found Lona Deeping weeping on her knees in a room where Fuji lay dead, where a bright *Spider* seal glowed upon the wall.

Lona Deeping rose into his arms, and Kirkpatrick's face was harsh. He hurled orders at the police. "The *Spider* kidnapped Mrs. Deeping," he rasped. "He has committed his last crime in this city! Hunt him down! Hunt him down, I tell you! I will not permit him to survive another day!"

But Lona Deeping stirred in his arms and looked up into his face, and the tears laid their silver tracery across the rose and damask of her cheek.

"Have I not wept tears enough, Stanley?" she asked softly.

Kirkpatrick shivered, and his hands closed tightly upon her arms. "You won't go away again," he said. "Dear, you must not! Tomorrow, you will marry me. Tomorrow. . ."

Lona smiled through her tears, "That is my wish, too, Stanley," she said. "Mine, too . . . unless you deem that I have not wept tears enough. The *Spider* has twice freed me from slavery."

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SATAN'S SEVEN SWORDSMEN

In the dark cubicle where the *Spider* stretched at ease, he could hear very clearly. And he would never be found. He was perfectly comfortable here until such time as the police left him a clear road to freedom. Lona Deeping had hidden him as he had told her:

"Ten tears are enough, my dear. This is the last and largest tear. For you have saved me, and my nation in its hour of greatest peril."

So the bitterness died from the lips of Kirkpatrick and he held Lona Deeping close, and Wentworth smiled.

"Eleven tears, Lona," whispered the *Spider*. "Eleven tears that shall become diamond stars in your crown!"

THE END



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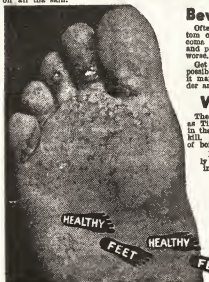
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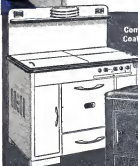
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